

## WOMEN IN JEWISH LITERATURE

Among the songs of the Bible there are two, belonging to the oldest monuments of poetry, which have preserved the power to inspire and elevate as when they were first uttered: the hymn of praise and thanksgiving sung by Moses and his sister Miriam, and the impassioned song of Deborah, the heroine in Israel.

Miriam and Deborah are the first Israelitish women whose melody thrilled and even now thrills us—Miriam, the inspired prophetess, pouring forth her people's joy and sorrow, and Deborah, *Esheth Lapidoth*, the Bible calls her, "the woman of the flaming heart," an old writer ingeniously interprets the Scriptural name. They are the chosen exemplars of all women who, stepping across the narrow confines of home, have lifted up a voice, or wielded a pen, for Israel. The time is not yet when woman in literature can be discussed without an introductory justification. The prejudice is still deep-rooted which insists that domestic activity is woman's only legitimate career, that to enter the literary arena is unwomanly, that inspired songs may drop only from male lips. Woman's heart should, indeed, be the abode of the angels of gentleness, modesty, kindness, and patience. But no contradiction is involved in



the belief that her mind is endowed with force and ability on occasion to grasp the spokes of fortune's wheel, or produce works which need not shrink from public criticism. Deborah herself felt that it would have better become a man to fulfil the mission with which she was charged—that a cozy home had been a more seemly place for her than the camp upon Mount Tabor. She says: "Desolate were the open towns in Israel, they were desolate. . . . Was there a shield seen or a spear among forty thousand in Israel? . . . I—unto the Lord will I sing." Not until the fields of Israel were desert, forsaken of able-bodied men, did the woman Deborah arise for the glory of God. She refused to pose as a heroine, rejected the crown of victory, nor coveted the poet's laurel, meet recognition of her triumphal song. Modestly she chose the simplest yet most beautiful of names. She summoned the warriors to battle; the word of God was proclaimed by her lips; she pronounced judgment, and right prevailed; her courage sustained her on the battlefield, and victory followed in her footsteps—yet neither judge, nor poetess, nor singer, nor prophetess will she call herself, but only *Em beyisrael*, "a mother in Israel."

This heroine, this "mother in Israel," in all the wanderings and vicissitudes of the Jewish people, was the exemplar of its women and maidens, the especial model of Israelitish poetesses and writers.

The student of Jewish literature is like an astronomer. While the casual observer faintly discerns

single stars dotted in the expanse of blue overhead, he takes in the whole sweep of the heavens, readily following the movements of the stars of every magnitude. The history of the Jewish race, its mere preservation during the long drawn out period of suffering—sad days of national dissolution and sombre middle age centuries—is a perplexing puzzle, unless regarded with the eye of faith. But that this race, cuffed, crushed, pursued, hounded from spot to spot, should have given birth to men, yea, even women ranking high in the realm of letters, is wholly inexplicable, unless the explanation of the unique phenomenon is sought in the wondrous gift of inspiration operative in Israel even after the last seer ceased to speak.

Judaism has preserved the Jews! Judaism, that is, the Law with its development and ramifications of a great religious thought, was the sustaining power of the Jewish people under its burden of misery, suffering, torture, and oppression, enabling it to survive its tormentors. The Jews were the nation of hope. Like hope this people is eternal. The storms of fanaticism and race hatred may rage and roar, the race cannot be destroyed. Precisely in the days of its abject degradation, when its suffering was dire, how marvellous the conduct of this people! The conquered were greater than their conquerors. From their spiritual height they looked down compassionately on their victorious but ignorant adversaries, who, feeling the condescension of the victims, drove their irons deeper. The little

nation grew only the stronger, and its religion, the flower of hope and trust, developed the more sturdily for its icy covering. Jews were mowed down by fire and sword, but Judaism continued to live. From the ashes of every pyre sprang the Jewish Law in unfading youth—that indestructible, ineradicable mentality and hope, which opponents are wont to call unconquerable Jewish defiance.

The men of this great little race were preserved by the Law, the spirit, and the influences and effects of this same Law transformed weak women into God-inspired martyrs, dowered the daughters of Israel with courage to sacrifice life for the glory of the God-idea confessed by their ancestors during thousands of years. Purity of morals, confiding domesticity, were the safeguards against storm and stress. The outside world presented a hostile front to the Jew of the middle ages. Every step beyond Ghetto precincts was beset with peril. So his home became his world, his sanctuary, in whose intimate seclusion the blossom of pure family love unfolded. While spiritual darkness brooded over the nations, the great Messianic God-idea took refuge from the icy chill of the middle ages in his humble rooms, where it was cherished against the coming of a glorious future.

“Every Jew has the making of a Messiah in him,” says a clever modern author,<sup>1</sup> “and every Jewess of a *mater dolorosa*,” of which the first part is only an epigram, the second, a truth, an historic fact. Me-

<sup>1</sup> M. Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem*, p. 2.

diæval Judaism knew many "sorrowful mothers," whose heroism passes our latter-day conception. Greece and Rome tell tales upon tales of womanly bravery under suffering and pain—Jewish history buries in silence the names of its thousands of woman and maiden martyrs, joyously giving up life in the vindication of their faith. Perhaps, had one woman been too weak to resist, too cowardly to court and embrace death, her name might have been preserved. Such, too, fail to appear in the Jewish annals, which contain but few women's names of any kind. Inspired devotion of strength and life to Judaism was as natural with a Jewess as quiet, unostentatious activity in her home. No need, therefore, to make mention of act or name.

Jewish woman, then, has neither found, nor sought, and does not need, a *Frauenlob*, historian or poet, to proclaim her praise in the gates, to touch the strings of his lyre in her honor. Her life, in its simplicity and gentleness, its patience and exalted devotion, is itself a Song of Songs, more beautiful than poet ever composed, a hymn more joyous than any ever sung, on the prophetess's sublime and touching text, *Em beyisrael*, "a mother in Israel."

As Miriam and Deborah are representative of womanhood during Israel's national life, so later times, the Talmudic periods, produced women with great and admirable qualities. Prominent among them was Beruriah, the gentle wife of Rabbi Meïr, the Beruriah whose heart is laid bare in the following touching story from the Talmud:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Midrash *Yalkut* on Proverbs.



One Sabbath her husband had been in the academy all day teaching the crowds that eagerly flocked to his lectures. During his absence from home, his two sons, distinguished for beauty and learning, died suddenly of a malignant disease. Beruriah bore the dear bodies into her sleeping chamber, and spread a white cloth over them. When the rabbi returned in the evening, and asked for his boys that, according to wont, he might bless them, his wife said, "They have gone to the house of God."

She brought the wine-cup, and he recited the concluding prayer of the Sabbath, drinking from the cup, and, in obedience to a hallowed custom, passing it to his wife. Again he asked, "Why are my sons not here to drink from the blessed cup?" "They cannot be far off," answered the patient sufferer, and suspecting naught, Rabbi Meïr was happy and cheerful. When he had finished his meal, Beruriah said: "Rabbi, allow me to ask you a question." With his permission, she continued: "Some time ago a treasure was entrusted to me, and now the owner demands it. Shall I give it up?" "Surely, my wife should not find it necessary to ask this question," said the rabbi. "Can you hesitate about returning property to its rightful owner?" "True," she replied, "but I thought best not to return it until I had advised you thereof." And she led him into the chamber to the bed, and withdrew the cloth from the bodies. "O, my sons, my sons," lamented the father with a loud voice, "light of my eyes, lamp of my soul. I was your father, but you taught me

the Law." Her eyes suffused with tears, Beruriah seized her grief-stricken husband's hand, and spoke: "Rabbi, did you not teach me to return without reluctance that which has been entrusted to our safe-keeping? See, 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'" "Blessed be the name of the Lord," repeated the rabbi, accepting her consolation, "and blessed, too, be His name for your sake; for, it is written: 'Who can find a virtuous woman? for far above pearls is her value. . . . She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is upon her tongue.'"

Surrounded by the halo of motherhood, richly dowered with intellectual gifts, distinguished for learning, gentleness, and refinement, Beruriah is a truly poetic figure. Incensed at the evil-doing of the unrighteous, her husband prayed for their destruction. "How can you ask that, Rabbi?" Beruriah interrupted him; "do not the Scriptures say: 'May *sins* cease from off the earth, and the wicked will be no more'? When *sin* ceases, there will be no more *sinner*s. Pray rather, my rabbi, that they repent, and amend their ways."<sup>1</sup>

That a woman could attain to Beruriah's mental poise, and make her voice heard and heeded in the councils of the teachers of the Law, and that the rabbis considered her sayings and doings worthy of record, would of itself, without the evidence of numerous other learned women of Talmud fame, prove, were proof necessary, the honorable position

<sup>1</sup> *Berachoth*, 10a.

occupied by Jewish women in those days. Long before Schiller, the Talmud said:<sup>1</sup> "Honor women, because they bring blessing." Of Abraham it is said: "It was well with him, because of his wife Sarah." Again: "More glorious is the promise made to women, than that to men: In Isaiah (xxxii. 9) we read: 'Ye women that are at ease, hear my voice!' for, with women it lies to inspire their husbands and sons with zeal for the study of the Law, the most meritorious of deeds." Everywhere the Talmud sounds the praise of the virtuous woman of Proverbs and of the blessings of a happy family life.

A single Talmudic sentence, namely, "He who teaches his daughter the Law, teaches her what is unworthy," torn from its context, and falsely interpreted, has given rise to most absurd theories with regard to the views of Talmudic times on the matter of woman's education. It should be taken into consideration that its author, who is responsible also for the sentiment that "woman's place is at the distaff," was the husband of Ima Shalom, a clever, highly cultured, but irascible woman, who was on intimate terms with Jewish Christians, and was wont to interfere in the disputations carried on by men—in short, a representative Talmudic blue-stocking, with all the attributes with which fancy would be prone to invest such a one.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere the Talmud tells about Rabbi Nachman's wife Yaltha, the proud and learned daughter of a princely line. Her guest, the poor itinerant

<sup>1</sup> *Baba Metsiah*, 59a.

<sup>2</sup> *Sota*, 20a.

preacher Rabbi Ulla, expressed the opinion that according to the Law it was not necessary to pass the wine-cup over which the blessing has been said to women. The opinion, surely not the withheld wine, so angered his hostess, that she shivered four hundred wine-pitchers, letting their contents flow over the ground.<sup>1</sup> If the rabbis had such incidents in mind, crabbed utterances were not unjustifiable. Perhaps every rabbinical antagonist to woman's higher education was himself the victim of a learned wife, who regaled him, after his toilsome research at the academy, with unpalatable soup, or, worse still, with Talmudic discussions. Instances are abundant of erudite rabbis tormented by their wives. One, we are told, refused to cook for her husband, and another, day after day, prepared a certain dish, knowing that he would not touch it.

But this is pleasantry. It would betray total ignorance of the Talmud and the rabbis to impute to them the scorn of woman prevalent at that time. The Talmud and its sages never weary of singing the praise of women, and at every occasion inculcate respect for them, and devotion to their service. The compiler of the Jerusalem Talmud, Rabbi Jochanan, whose life is crowned with the aureole of romance, pays a delicate tribute to woman by the question: "Who directed the first prayer of thanksgiving to God? A woman, Leah, when she cried out in the fulness of her joy: 'Now again will I praise the Lord.'"

<sup>1</sup> *Berachoth*, 51b.



Under the influence of such ideal views, and in obedience to such standards, Jewish woman led a modest, retired life of domestic activity, the helpmeet and solace of her husband, the joy of his age, the treasure of his liberty, his comforter in sorrow. For, when the portentous catastrophe overwhelmed the Jewish nation, when Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins, when the noblest of the people were slain, and the remnant of Israel was made to wander forth out of his land into a hostile world, to fulfil his mission as a witness to the truth of monotheism, then Jewish woman, too, was found ready to assume the burdens imposed by distressful days.

Israel, broken up into unresisting fragments, began his two thousand years' journey through the desert of time, despoiled of all possessions except his Law and his family. Of these treasures Titus and his legions could not rob him. From the ruins of the Jewish state blossomed forth the spirit of Jewish life and law in vigorous renewal. Judaism rose rejuvenated on the crumbling temples of Jupiter, immaculate in doctrine, incorruptible in practice. Israel's spiritual guides realized that adherence to the Law is the only safeguard against annihilation and oblivion. From that time forth, the men became the guardians of the *Law*, the women the guardians of the purity of *life*, both working harmoniously for the preservation of Judaism.

The muse of history recorded no names of Jewish women from the destruction of the Temple to the eleventh century. Yet the student cannot fail

to assign the remarkable preservation of the race to woman's gentle, quiet, though paramount influence by the side of the earnest tenacity of men. Among Jews leisure, among non-Jews knowledge, was lacking to preserve names for the instruction of posterity. Before Jews could record their suffering, the oppressor's hand again fell, its grasp more relentless than ever. For many centuries blood and tears constitute the chronicle of Jewish life, and at the sources of these streams of blood and rivers of tears, the genius of Jewish history sits lamenting.

Whenever the sun of tolerance broke through the clouds of oppression, and for even a brief period shone upon the martyr race, its marvellous development under persecution and in despite of unspeakable suffering at once stood revealed. During these occasional breaks in the darkness, women appeared whose erudition was so profound as to earn special mention. As was said above, the first names of women distinguished for beauty and intellect come down to us from the eleventh century, and even then only Italy, Provence, Andalusia, and the Orient, were favored, Jews in these countries living unmolested and in comparative freedom, and zealously devoting their leisure to the study of the Talmud and secular branches of learning. In praise of Italy it was said: "Out of Bari goes forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Otranto." It is, therefore, not surprising to read in Jewish sources of the maiden Paula, of the family Deï Mansi (Anawim), the daughter of Abraham, and later the wife of Yechiel

dei Mansi, who, in 1288, copied her father's abstruse Talmudic commentary, adding ingenious explanations, the result of independent research. But one grows somewhat sceptical over the account, by a Jewish tourist, Rabbi Petachya of Ratisbon, of Bath Halevi, daughter of Rabbi Samuel ben Ali in Bagdad, equally well-read in the Bible and the Talmud, and famous for her beauty. She lectured on the Talmud to a large number of students, and, to prevent their falling in love with her, she sat behind lattice-work or in a glass cabinet, that she might be heard but not seen. The dry tourist-chronicler fails to report whether her disciples approved of the preventive measure, and whether in the end it turned out to have been effectual. At all events, the example of the learned maiden found an imitator. Almost a century later we meet with Miriam Shapiro, of Constance, a beautiful Jewish girl, who likewise delivered public lectures on the Talmud sitting behind a curtain, that the attention of her inquisitive pupils might not be distracted by sight of her from their studies.

Of the learned El Muallima we are told that she transplanted Karaite doctrines from the Orient to Castile, where she propagated them. The daughter of the prince of poets, Yehuda Halevi, is accredited with a soulful religious poem hitherto attributed to her father, and Rabbi Joseph ibn Nagdela's wife was esteemed the most learned and representative woman in Granada. Even in the choir of Arabic-Andalusian poets we hear the voice of a Jewish song-

stress, Kasmune, the daughter of the poet Ishmael. Only a few blossoms of her delicate poetry have been preserved.<sup>1</sup> Catching sight of her young face in the mirror, she called out:

"A vine I see, and though 'tis time to glean,  
No hand is yet stretched forth to cull the fruit.  
Alas! my youth doth pass in sorrow keen,  
A nameless 'him' my eyes in vain salute."

Her pet gazelle, raised by herself, she addresses thus:

"In only thee, my timid, fleet gazelle,  
Dark-eyed like thee, I see my counterpart;  
We both live lone, without companion dwell,  
Accepting fate's decree with patient heart."

Of other women we are told whose learning and piety inspired respect, not only in Talmudic authorities, but, more than that, in their sisters in faith. Especially in the family of Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac), immortal through his commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud, a number of women distinguished themselves. His daughter Rachel (Belle-jeune), on one occasion when her father was sick, wrote out for Rabbi Abraham Cohen of Mayence an opinion on religious questions in dispute. Rashi's two granddaughters, Anna and Miriam, were equally famous. In questions relating to the dietary laws, they were cited as authorities, and their decisions accepted as final.

<sup>1</sup> Cmp. W. Bacher in *Frankel-Graetz Monatsschrift*, Vol. XX., p. 186.



Zunz calls the wife of Rabbi Joseph ben Jochanan of Paris "almost a rabbi"; and Dolce, wife of the learned Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, supported her family with the work of her hands, was a thorough student of the dietary laws, taught women on Jewish subjects, and on Sabbath delivered public lectures. She wore the twofold crown of learning and martyrdom. On December 6, 1213, fanatic crusaders rushed into the rabbi's house, and most cruelly killed her and her two daughters, Bella and Anna.

Israel having again fallen on evil times, the rarity of women writers during the next two centuries needs no explanation. In the sixteenth century their names reappear on the records, not only as Talmudic scholars, but also as writers of history in the German language. Litte of Ratisbon composed a history of King David in the celebrated "Book of Samuel," a poem in the *Nibelungen* stanza, and we are told that Rachel Ackermann of Vienna was banished for having written a piquant novel, "Court Secrets."

These tentative efforts led the way to busy and widespread activity by Jewish women in various branches of literature at a somewhat later period, when the so-called *Judendeutsch*, also known as *Altweiberdeutsch* (old women's German), came into general use. Rebekah Tiktiner, daughter of Rabbi Meir Tiktiner, attained to a reputation considerable enough to suggest her scholarly work to J. G. Zeltner, a Rostock professor, as the subject of an essay published in 1719. Her book, *Meneketh Ribka*,

deals with the duties of woman. Edel Mendels of Cracow epitomized "Yosippon" (History of the Jews after Josephus); Bella Chasan, who died a martyr's death, composed two instructive works on Jewish history, in their time widely read; Glikel Hamel of Hamburg wrote her memoirs, describing her contemporaries and the remarkable events of her life; Hannah Ashkenasi was the author of addresses on moral subjects; and Ella Götz translated the Hebrew prayers into Jewish-German.

Litte of Ratisbon found imitators. Rosa Fischels of Cracow was the first to put the psalms into Jewish-German rhymes (1586). She turned the whole psalter "into simple German very prettily, modestly, and withal pleasantly for women and maidens to read." The authoress acknowledges that it was her aim to imitate the rhyme and melody of the "Book of Samuel" by her famed predecessor. Occasionally her paraphrase rises to the height of true poetry, as in the first and last verses of Psalm xcvi:

"Sing to God a new song, sing to God all the land, sing to God, praise His name, show forth His ready help from day to day. . . . The field and all thereon shall show great joy; they will sing with all their leaves, the trees of the wood and the grove, before the Lord God who will come to judge the earth far and near. He judgeth the earth with righteousness and the nations with truth."

Rosa Fischels was followed by a succession of women writers: Taube Pan in Prague, a poetess; Bella Hurwitz, who wrote a history of the House

of David, and, in association with Rachel Rausnitz, an account of the settlement of Jews in Prague; and a number of scholarly women famous among their co-religionists for knowledge of the Talmud, piety, and broad, secular culture.

In a rapid review like this of woman's achievements on the field of Jewish scholarship, the results recorded must appear meagre, owing partly to the paucity of available data, partly to the nature of the inquiry. Abstruse learning, pure science, original research, are by no means woman's portion. Such occupations demand complete surrender on the part of the student, uninterrupted attention to the subject pursued, and delicately organized woman is not capable of such absorption. Woman's perceptions are subtle, and she rests satisfied with her intuitions; while man strives to transmute his feelings, deeper than hers, into action. The external appeals to woman who comprehends easily and quickly, and, therefore, does not penetrate beneath the surface. Man, on the other hand, strives to pierce to the essence of things, apprehends more slowly, but thinks more profoundly, and tests carefully before he accepts. Hence we so rarely meet woman in the field of science, while her work in the domain of poetry and the humanities is abundant and attractive. Jewish women form no exception to the rule: a survey of Jewish poetry will show woman's share in its productions to have been considerable and of high quality. While there was little or no possibility to prosecute historic or scien-

tific inquiry during the harrowing days of persecution, the well-spring of Jewish poetry never ran dry. Poetry followed the race into exile, and clung to it through all vicissitudes, its solacement in suffering, the holy mediatrix between its past and future. "The Orient dwells an exile in the Occident, and its tears of longing for home are the fountain-head of Jewish poetry," says a Christian scholar. And at the altar of this poetry, whose sweetness and purity sanctified home life, and spread a sense of morality in a time when brutality and corruptness were general, the women singers of Israel offered the gifts of their muse. While the culture of that time culminated in the service of love (*MinneDienst*), in woman worship, so offensive to modern taste, Jewish poetry was pervaded by a pure, ideal conception of love and womanhood, testifying to the high ethical principles of its devotees.

Judaism and Jewish poetry know naught of the sensual love so assiduously fostered by the cult of the Virgin. "Love," says a celebrated historian of literature, "was glorified in all shapes and guises, and represented as the highest aim of life. Woman's virtues, yea, even her vices, were invested with exaggerated importance. Woman became accustomed to think that she could be neither faithful nor faithless without turning the world topsy-turvy. She shared the fate of all objects of excessive adulation: flattery corrupted her. Thus it came about that love of woman overshadowed every other social force and every form of family affection, and so spent its



power. The Jews were the only ones sane enough to subordinate sexual love to reverence for motherhood. Alexander Weill makes a Jewish mother say: 'Is it proper for a good Jewish mother to concern herself about love? Love is revolting idolatry. A Jewess may love only God, her husband, and her children.' Granny (*Alt-Babele*) in one of Kompert's tales says: 'God could not be everywhere, so he created mothers.' In Jewish novels, maternal love is made the basis of family life, its passion and its mystery. A Jewish mother! What an image the words conjure up! Her face is calm, though pale; a melancholy smile rests upon her lips, and her soulful eyes seem to hide in their depths the vision of a remote future."

This is a correct view. Jewish poetry is interpenetrated with the breath of intellectual love, that is, love growing out of the recognition of duty, no less ideal than sensual love. In the heart of the Jew love is an infinite force. Too mighty to be confined to the narrow limits of personal passion, it extends so as to include future generations.

Thus it happened that while in Christian poetry woman was the subject of song and sonnet, in Jewish poetry she herself sang and composed, and her productions are worthy of ranking beside the best poetic creations of each generation.

The earliest blossoms of Jewish poetry by women unfolded in the spring-like atmosphere of the Renaissance under the blue sky of Italy, the home of the immortal trio, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

The first Jewish women writers of Italian verse were Deborah Ascarelli and Sara Copia Sullam, who, arrayed in the full panoply of the culture of their day, and as thoroughly equipped with Jewish knowledge, devoted their talents and their zeal to the service of their nation.

Deborah Ascarelli of Rome, the pride of her sex, was the wife of the respected rabbi Giuseppe Ascarelli, and lived at Venice in the beginning of the seventeenth century. She made a graceful Italian translation of Moses Rieti's *Sefer ha-Hechal*, a Hebrew poem written in imitation of the *Divina Commedia*, and enjoying much favor at Rome. As early as 1609, David della Rocca published a second edition of her translation, dedicating it to the charming authoress. To put the highly wrought, artificial poetry of the Hebrew Dante into mellifluous Italian verse was by no means easy. While Rieti's poetry is not distinguished by the vigor and fulness of the older classical productions of neo-Hebraic poetry, his rhythm is smooth, pleasant, and polished. Yet her rendition is admirable. Besides, she won fame as a writer of hymns in praise of the God of her people, who so wondrously rescued it from all manner of distress.

"Let other poets of victory's trophies tell,  
Thy song will e'er thy people's praises swell,"

says a Jewish Italian poet enchanted by her talent.

A still more gifted poetess was Sara Copia Sul-

lam, a particular star in Judah's galaxy.<sup>1</sup> The only child of a wealthy Venetian at the end of the sixteenth century, she was indulged in her love of study, and afforded every opportunity to advance in the arts and sciences. "She revelled in the realm of beauty, and crystallized her enthusiasm in graceful, sweet, maidenly verses. Young, lovely, of generous impulses and keen intellectual powers, her ambition set upon lofty attainments, a favorite of the muses, Sara Copia charmed youth and age."

These graces of mind became her misfortune. An old Italian priest, Ansaldo Çeba, in Genoa, published an Italian epic with the Esther of the Bible as the heroine. Sara was delighted with the choice of the subject. It was natural that a high-minded, sensitive girl with lofty ideals, stung to the quick by the injustice and contumely suffered by her people, should rejoice extravagantly in the praise lavished upon a heroine of her nation. Carried away by enthusiasm she wrote the poet, a stranger to her, a letter overflowing with gratitude for the pure delight his poem had yielded her. Her passionate warmth, betraying at once the accomplished poetess and the gifted thinker, did not fail to fascinate the old priest, who immediately resolved to capture this beautiful soul for the church. His desire brought about a lively correspondence, our chief source of information about Sara Copia. Her conversion became a passion with the highstrung priest, taking complete

<sup>1</sup> Cmp. E. David, *Sara Copia Sullam, une héroïne juive au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

possession of him during the last years of his life. He brought to bear upon her case every trick of dialectics and flattery at his command. All in vain. The greatest successes of which he could boast were her promise to read the New Testament, and her consent to his praying for her conversion. Sara's arguments in favor of Judaism arouse the reader's admiration for the sharpness of intellect displayed, her poetic genius, and her intimate acquaintance with Jewish sources as well as philosophic systems.

Ansaldo never abandoned the hope of gaining her over to Christianity. Unable to convince her reason, he attacked her heart. Though evincing singular love and veneration for her old admirer, Sara could not be moved from steadfast adherence to her faith. She sent him her picture with the words: "This is the picture of one who carries yours deeply graven on her heart, and, with finger pointing to her bosom, tells the world: 'Here dwells my idol, bow before him.'"

With old age creeping upon him with its palsy touch, he continued to think of nothing but Sara's conversion, and assailed her in prose and verse. One of his imploring letters closes thus:

"Life's fair, bright morn bathes thee in light,  
Thy cheeks are softly flushed with youthful zest.  
For me the night sets in; my limbs  
Are cold, but ardent love glows in my breast."

Sara having compared his poems with those of Amphion and Orpheus, he answered her:



"To Amphion the stones lent ear  
When soft he touched his lute ;  
And beasts came trooping nigh to hear  
When Orpheus played his flute.

How long, O Sara, wilt thou liken me  
To those great singers of the olden days ?  
My God and faith I sought to give to thee,  
In vain I proved the error of thy ways.  
Their song had charms more potent than my own,  
Or art thou harder than a beast or stone ?"

The query long remained unanswered, for just then the poetess was harassed by many trials. Serious illness prostrated her, then her beloved father died, and finally she was unjustly charged by the envious among her co-religionists with neglect of Jewish observances, and denial of the divine origin of the Law. She found no difficulty in refuting the malicious accusation, but she was stung to the quick by the calumnious attack, the pain it inflicted vanishing only in the presence of a grave danger. Balthasar Bonifacio, an obscure author, in a brochure published for that purpose, accused her of rejecting the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a most serious charge, which, if sustained, would have thrown her into the clutches of the Inquisition. In two days she wrote a brilliant defense completely exonerating herself and exposing the spitefulness of the attack, a masterful production by reason of its vigorous dialectics, incisive satire, and noble enthusiasm for the cause of religion. Together with some few of her sonnets, this is all that has come down to us of her writings. She opened her vindication with the following sonnet:



"O Lord, Thou know'st my inmost hope and thought,  
 Thou know'st whene'er before Thy judgment throne  
 I shed salt tears, and uttered many a moan,  
 'Twas not for vanities that I besought.  
 O turn on me Thy look with mercy fraught,  
 And see how envious malice makes me groan !  
 The pall upon my heart by error thrown  
 Remove ; illume me with Thy radiant thought.  
 At truth let not the wicked scorner mock,  
 O Thou, that breath'dst in me a spark divine.  
 The lying tongue's deceit with silence blight,  
 Protect me from its venom, Thou, my Rock,  
 And show the spiteful sland'rer by this sign  
 That Thou dost shield me with Thy endless might."

Sara's vindication was complete. Her friend Ceba was kept faithfully informed of all that befell her, but he was absorbed in thoughts of her conversion and his approaching end. He wrote to her that he did not care to receive any more letters from her unless they announced her acceptance of the true faith.

After Ansaldo's death, we hear nothing more about the poetess. She died at the beginning of 1641, and the celebrated rabbi, Leon de Modena, composed her epitaph, a poetic tribute to one whose life redounded to the glory of Judaism.

Our subject now carries us from the luxuriant south to the dunes of the North Sea. Holland was the first to open the doors of its cities hospitably to the three hundred thousand Jews exiled from Spain, and its busy capital Amsterdam became the centre whither tended the intelligent of the Marranos, flee-

ing before the Holy Inquisition. Physicians, mathematicians, philologists, military men, and diplomats, poets and poetesses, took refuge there. Among the poetesses,<sup>1</sup> the most prominent was Isabella Correa, distinguished for wit as well as poetic endowment, the wife of the Jewish captain and author, Nicolas de Oliver y Fullano, of Majorca. One of her contemporaries, Daniel de Barrios, says that "she was an accomplished linguist, wrote delightful letters, composed exquisite verses, played the lute like a *maestro*, and sang like an angel. Her sparkling black eyes sent piercing darts into every beholder's heart, and she was famed for beauty as well as intellect." She made a noble Spanish translation of *Pastor Fido*, the most popular Italian drama of the day, and published a volume of poems, also in Spanish. Antonio dos Reys sings her praises:

"*Pastor Fido!* no longer art thou read in thy own tongue,  
since Correa,  
Faithfully rendering thy song, created thee anew in  
Spanish forms.  
A laurel wreath surmounts her brow,  
Because her right hand had cunning to strike tones from  
the tragic lyre.  
On the mount of singers, a seat is reserved for her,  
Albeit many a Batavian voice refused consent.  
For, Correa's faith invited scorn from aliens,  
And her own despised her cheerful serenity.  
Now, with greater justice, all bend a reverent knee to  
Correa, the Jewess,  
Correa, who, it seems, is wholly like Lysia."

<sup>1</sup> For the following, compare Kayserling, *Sephardim*, p. 250 ff.

Donna Isabella Enriquez, a Spanish poetess of great versatility, was her contemporary. She lived first in Madrid, afterwards in Amsterdam, and even in advanced age was surrounded by admirers. At the age of sixty-two, she presented the men of her acquaintance with amulets against love, notwithstanding that she had spoken and written against the use of charms. For instance, when an egg with a crown on the end was found in the house of Isaac Aboab, the celebrated rabbi at Amsterdam, she wrote him the following:

"See, the terror! Lo! the wonder!  
 Basilisk, the fabled viper!  
 Superstition names it so.  
 Look at it, I pray, with calmness,  
 'Twas thy mind that was at fault.  
 God's great goodness is displayed here;  
 He, I trow, rewards thy eloquence  
 In the monster which thou seest:  
 All this rounded whole's thy virtue,  
 Wisdom's symbol is the crown!"

Besides Isabella Correa and Isabella Enriquez, we have the names, though not the productions, of Sara de Fonseca Pina y Pimentel, Bienvenida Cohen Belmonte, and Manuela Nunes de Almeida. They have left but faint traces of their work, and fancy can fill in the sketch only with conjectures.

After these Marrano poetesses, silence fell upon the women of Israel for a whole century—a century of oppression and political slavery, of isolation in noisome Ghettos, of Christian scorn and mockery.

The Jews of Germany and Poland, completely crushed beneath the load of sorrow, hibernated until the gentle breath of a new time, levelling Ghetto walls and heralding a dawn when human rights would be recognized, awoke them to activity and achievement.

Mighty is the spirit of the times! It clears a way for itself, boldly pushing aside every stumbling-block in the shape of outworn prejudices and decaying customs. A century dawned, the promise of liberty and tolerance flaming on its horizon, to none so sweet as to the Jew. Who has the heart to cast the first stone upon a much-tried race, tortured throughout the centuries, for surrendering itself to the unwonted joy of living, for drinking deep, intoxicating draughts from the newly discovered fount of liberty, and, alas! for throwing aside, under the burning sun of the new era, the perennial protection of its religion? And may we utterly condemn the daughters of Israel, the "roses of Sharon," and "lilies of the valleys," "unkissed by the dew, lost wanderers cheered by no greeting," who, now that all was sunshine, forgot their people, and disregarded the sanctity of family bonds, their shield and their refuge in the sorrow and peril of the dark ages?

With emotion, with pain, not with resentment, Jewish history tells of those women, who spurned Judaism, knowing only its external appearance, its husk, not its essence, high ethical principles and philosophical truths—of Rahel Varnhagen, Henriette Herz, Regina Fröhlich, Dorothea Mendelssohn,



Sarah and Marianne Meyer, Esther Gad, and many others, first products of German culture in alliance with Jewish wit and brilliancy.

Rahel Levin was the foster-mother of "Young Germany," and leader in the woman's emancipation movement, so fruitful later on of deplorable excesses. Rahel herself never overstepped the limits of "*das Ewig-Weibliche*." No act of hers ran counter to the most exalted requirements of morality. Her being was pervaded by high seriousness, noble dignity, serene cheerfulness. "She dwelt always in the Holy of holies of thought, and even her most daring wishes for herself and mankind leapt shyly heavenwards like pure sacrificial flames." Nothing more touching can be found in the history of the human heart than her confession before death: "With sublime rapture I dwell upon my origin and the marvellous web woven by fate, binding together the oldest recollections of the human race and its most recent aspirations, connecting scenes separated by the greatest possible intervals of time and space. My Jewish birth which I long considered a stigma, a sore disgrace, has now become a precious inheritance, of which nothing on earth can deprive me."<sup>1</sup>

The fact is that Rahel Levin was a great woman, great even in her aberrations, while her satellites, shining by reflected light, and pretending to perpetuate her spirit, transgressed the bounds of wom-

<sup>1</sup> Cmp. *Rahel, ein Buch des Andenkens für ihre Freunde*, Vol. I., p. 43.

anliness, and opened wide a door to riotous sensuality. Certain opponents of the woman's emancipation movement take malicious satisfaction in rehearsing that it was a Jewess who inaugurated it, prudently neglecting to mention that in the list of Rahel's followers, not one Jewish name appears.

The spirit of Judaism and with it the spirit of morality can never be extinguished. They may flag, or vanish for a time, but their restoration in increased vigor and radiance is certain; for, they bear within themselves the guarantee of a future. Henriette Herz, the apostate daughter of Judaism chewing the cud of Schleiermacher's sentimentality and Schlegel's romanticism, had not yet passed away when England produced Jewish women whose deeds were quickened by the spirit of olden heroism, who walked in the paths of wisdom and faith, and, recoiling from the cowardice that counsels apostasy, would have fought, if need be, suffered, and bled, for their faith. What answer but the blush of shame mantling her cheek could the proud beauty have found, had she been asked by, let us say, Lady Judith Montefiore, to tell what it was that chained her to the ruins of the Jewish race?

Lady Montefiore truly was a heroine, worthy to be named with those who have made our past illustrious, and her peer in intellect and strength of character was Charlotte Montefiore, whose early death was a serious loss to Judaism as well as to her family. Her work, "A Few Words to the Jews by one of themselves," containing that charming tale,

"The Jewel Island," displays intellectual and poetic gifts.

The most prominent of women writers in our era unquestionably is Grace Aguilar, in whom we must admire the rare union of broad culture and profound piety. She was born at Hackney in June of 1816, and early showed extraordinary talent and insatiable thirst for knowledge. In her twelfth year she wrote "*Gustavus Vasa*," an historical drama evincing such unusual gifts that her parents were induced to devote themselves exclusively to her education. It is a charming picture this, of a young, gifted girl, under the loving care of cultured parents actuated by the sole desire to imbue their daughter with their own taste for natural and artistic beauty and their steadfast love for Judaism, and content to lead a modest existence, away from the bustle and the opportunities of the city, in order to be able to give themselves up wholly to the education and companionship of their beloved, only daughter. Under the influence of a wise friend, Grace Aguilar herself tells us, she supplicated God to enable her to do something by which her people might gain higher esteem with their Christian fellow-citizens.

God hearkened unto her prayer, for her efforts were crowned with success. Her first work was the translation of a book from the Hebrew, "*Israel Defended*." Next came "*The Magic Wreath*," a collection of poems, and then her well-known works, "*Home Influence*," "*The Spirit of Judaism*," her best production, "*The Women of Israel*," "*The*

Jewish Faith," and "History of the Jews in England"—a rich harvest for one whose span of life was short. Her pen was dipped into the blood of her veins and the sap of her nerves; the sacred fire of the prophets burnt in her soul, and she was inspired by olden Jewish enthusiasm and devotion to a trust.

So ardent a spirit could not long be imprisoned within so frail a body. In the very prime of life, just thirty-one years old, Grace Aguilar passed away, as though her beautiful soul were hastening to shake off the mortal coil. She rests in German earth, in the Frankfort Jewish cemetery. Her grave is marked with a simple stone, bearing an equally simple epitaph:

"Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
And let her own works praise her in the gates."

Her death was deeply lamented far and wide. She was a golden link in the chain of humanity—a bold, courageous, withal thoroughly womanly woman, a God-inspired daughter of her race and faith. "We are persuaded," says a non-Jewish friend of hers, "that had this young woman lived in the times of frightful persecution, she would willingly have mounted the stake for her faith, praying for her murderers with her last breath." That the nobility of a solitary woman, leaping like a flame from heart to heart, may inspire highminded thoughts, and that Grace Aguilar's life became a blessing for her people and for humanity, is illustrated by the



following testimonial signed by several hundred Jewish women, presented to her when she was about to leave England:

"Dearest Sister—Our admiration of your talents, our veneration for your character, our gratitude for the eminent services your writings render our sex, our people, our faith, in which the sacred cause of true religion is embodied: all these motives combine to induce us to intrude on your presence, in order to give utterance to sentiments which we are happy to feel and delighted to express. Until you arose, it has, in modern times, never been the case that a Woman in Israel should stand forth the public advocate of the faith of Israel; that with the depth and purity of feelings which is the treasure of woman, and with the strength of mind and extensive knowledge that form the pride of man, she should call on her own to cherish, on others to respect, the truth as it is in Israel.

"You, dearest Sister, have done this, and more. You have taught us to know and appreciate our dignity; to feel and to prove that no female character can be . . . more pure than that of the Jewish maiden, none more pious than that of the woman in Israel. You have vindicated our social and spiritual equality with our brethren in the faith: you have, by your own excellent example, triumphantly refuted the aspersion, that the Jewish religion leaves unmoved the heart of the Jewish woman. Your writings place within our reach those higher motives, those holier consolations, which flow from the

spirituality of our religion, which urge the soul to commune with its Maker and direct it to His grace and His mercy as the best guide and protector here and hereafter. . . .”

Her example fell like seed upon fertile soil, for Abigail Lindo, Marian Hartog, Annette Salomon, and especially Anna Maria Goldsmid, a writer of merit, daughter of the well-known Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, may be considered her disciples, the fruit of her sowing.

The Italian poetess, Rachel Morpurgo, a worthy successor of Deborah Ascarelli and Sara Copia Sullam, was contemporaneous with Grace Aguilar, though her senior by twenty-six years. Our interest in her is heightened by her use of the Hebrew language, which she handled with such consummate skill that her writings easily take rank with the best of neo-Hebraic literature. A niece of the famous scholar S. D. Luzzatto, she was born at Trieste, April 8, 1790. Until the age of twelve she studied the Bible, then she read Bechai's "Duties of the Heart" and Rashi's commentary, and from her fourteenth to her sixteenth year she devoted herself to the Talmud and the Zohar—a remarkable course of study, pursued, too, in despite of adverse circumstances. At the same time she was taught the turner's art by Luzzatto's father, and later she learned tailoring. One of her poems having been published without her knowledge, she gives vent to her regret in a sonnet:

"My soul surcharged with grief now loud complains,  
And fears upon my spirit heavily weigh.  
'Thy poem we have heard,' the people say,  
'Who like to thee can sing melodious strains?'  
'They're naught but sparks,' outspeaks my soul in chains,  
'Struck from my life by torture every day.  
But now all perfume's fled—no more my lay  
Shall rise; for, fear of shame my song restrains.'  
A woman's fancies lightly roam, and weave  
Themselves into a fairy web. Should I  
Refrain? Ah! soon enough this pleasure, too,  
Will flee! Verily I cannot conceive  
Why I'm extolled. For woman 'tis to ply  
The spinning wheel—then to herself she's true."

This painful self-consciousness, coupled with the oppression of material cares, forms the sad refrain of Rachel Morpurgo's writings. She is a true poetess: the woes of humanity are reflected in her own sorrows, to which she gave utterance in soulful tones. She, too, became an exemplar for a number of young women. A Pole, Yenta Wohllerner, like Rachel Morpurgo, had to propitiate churlish circumstances before she could publish the gifts of her muse, and Miriam Mosessohn, Bertha Rabbinowicz, and others, emulated her masterly handling of the Hebrew language.

The opening of the new era was marked by the appearance of a triad of Jewesses—Grace Aguilar in England, Rachel Morpurgo in Italy, and Henriette Ottenheimer in Germany. A native of the blessed land of Suabia, Henriette Ottenheimer was consecrated to poetry by intercourse with two mas-

ters of song—Uhland and Rückert. Her poems, fragrant blossoms plucked on Suabian fields, for the most part are no more than sweet womanly lyrics, growing strong with the force of enthusiasm only when she dwells upon her people's sacred mission and the heroes of Bible days.

Women like these renew the olden fame of the Jewess, and add achievements to her brilliant record. As for their successors and imitators, our contemporaries, whose literary productions are before us, on them we may not yet pass judgment; their work is still on probation.

One striking circumstance in connection with their activity should be pointed out, because it goes to prove the soundness of judgment, the penetration, and expansiveness characteristic of Jews. While the movement for woman's complete emancipation has counted not a single Jewess among its promoters, its more legitimate successor, the movement to establish woman's right and ability to earn a livelihood in any branch of human endeavor—a right and ability denied only by prejudice, or stupidity—was headed and zealously supported by Jewesses, an assertion which can readily be proved by such names as Lina Morgenstern, known to the public also as an advocate of moderate religious reforms, Jenny Hirsch, Henriette Goldschmidt, and a number of writers on subjects of general and Jewish interest, such as Rachel Meyer, Elise Levi (Henle), Ulla Frank-Wolff, Johanna Goldschmidt, Caroline Deutsch, in Germany; Rebekah Eugenie Foa, Juli-



anna and Pauline Bloch, in France; Estelle and Maria Hertzveld, in Holland, and Emma Lazarus, in America.

One other name should be recorded. Fanny Neuda, the writer of "Hours of Devotion," and a number of juvenile stories, has a double claim upon our recognition, inasmuch as she is an authoress of the Jewish race who has addressed her writings exclusively to Jewish women.

We have followed Jewish women from the days of their first flight into the realm of song through a period of two thousand years up to modern times, when our record would seem to come to a natural conclusion. But I deem it proper to bring to your attention a set of circumstances which would be called phenomenal, were it not, as we all know, that the greatest of all wonders is that true wonders are so common.

It is a well-known fact, spread by literary journals, that the Rothschild family, conspicuous for financial ability, has produced a goodly number of authoresses. But it is less well known, and much more noteworthy, that many of the excellent women of this family have devoted their literary gifts and attainments to the service of Judaism. The palaces of the Rothschilds, the richest family in the world, harbor many a warm heart, whose pulsations are quickened by the thought of Israel's history and poetic heritage. Wealth has not abated a jot of their enthusiasm and loyal love for the faith. The first of the house of Rothschild to make a name for

herself as an authoress was Lady Charlotte Rothschild, in London, one of the noblest women of our time, who, standing in the glare of prosperity, did not disdain to take up the cudgels in defense of her people, to go Sabbath after Sabbath to her poor, unfortunate sisters in faith, and expound to them, in the school established by her generosity, the nature and duties of a moral, religious life, in lectures pervaded by the spirit of truth and faith. Two volumes of these addresses have been published in German and English (1864 and 1869), and every page gives evidence of rare piety, considerable scholarship, thorough knowledge of the Bible, and a high degree of culture. Equal enthusiasm for Judaism pervades the two volumes of "Thoughts Suggested by Bible Texts" (1859), by Baroness Louise, another of the English Rothschilds.

Three young women of this house, in which wealth is not hostile to idealism, have distinguished themselves as writers, foremost among them Clementine Rothschild, a gentle, sweet maiden, claimed by death before life with its storms could rob her of the pure ideals of youth. She died in her twentieth year, and her legacy to her family and her faith is contained in "Letters to a Christian Friend on the Fundamental Truths of Judaism," abundantly worthy of the perusal of all women, regardless of creed. This young woman displayed more courage, more enthusiasm, more wit, to be sure also more precise knowledge of Judaism, than thousands of men of our time, young and old, who fancy gran-

diloquent periods sufficient to solve the great religious problems perplexing mankind.

Finally, mention must be made of Constance and Anna de Rothschild, whose two volume "History and Literature of the Israelites" (1872) created a veritable sensation, and awakened the literary world to the fact that the Rothschild family is distinguished not only for wealth, but also for the talent and religious zeal of its authoresses.

I have ventured to group these women of the Rothschild family together as a conclusion to the history of Jewish women in literature, because I take their work to be an earnest of future accomplishment. Such examples cannot fail to kindle the spark of enthusiasm slumbering in the hearts of Jewish women, and the sacred flame of religious zeal, tended once more by women, will leap from rank to rank in the Jewish army. As it is, a half-century has brought about a remarkable change in feeling towards Judaism. Fifty years ago the following lines by Caroline Deutsch, one of the above-mentioned modern German writers, could not have awakened the same responsive chord as now:

"Little cruet in the Temple  
That didst feed the sacrificial flame,  
What a true expressive symbol  
Art thou of my race, of Israel's fame!  
Thou for days the oil didst furnish  
To illumine the Temple won from foe—  
So for centuries in my people  
Spirit of resistance ne'er burnt low.

It was cast from home and country,  
Gloom and sorrow were its daily lot;  
Yet the torch of faith gleamed steady,  
Courage, like thy oil, forsook it not.  
Mocks and jeers were all its portion,  
Death assailed it in ten thousand forms—  
Yet this people never faltered,  
Hope, its beacon, led it through all storms.  
Poorer than dumb, driven cattle,  
It went forth enslaved from its estate,  
All its footsore wand'rings lighted  
By its consciousness of worth innate.  
Luckless fortunes could not bend it;  
Unjust laws increased its wondrous faith;  
From its heart exhaustless streaming,  
Freedom's light shone on its thorny path.  
Oil that burnt in olden Temple,  
Eight days only didst thou give forth light!  
Oil of faith sustained this people  
Through the centuries of darkest night!"

We can afford to look forward to the future of Judaism serenely. The signs of the times seem propitious to him whose eye is clear to read them, whose heart not too embittered to understand their message aright.

Our rough and tumble time, delighting in negation and destruction, crushing underfoot the tender blossoms of poetry and faith, living up to its quasi motto, "What will not die of itself, must be put to death," will suddenly come to a stop in its mad career of annihilation. That will mark the dawn of a new era, the first stirrings of a new spring-tide for storm-driven Israel. On the ruins will rise the Jew-



ish home, based on Israel's world-saving conception of family life, which, having enlightened the nations of the earth, will return to the source whence it first issued. Built on this foundation, and resting on the pillars of modern culture, Jewish spirit, and true morality, the Jewish home will once more invite the nations to exclaim: "How beautiful are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings, O Israel!"

May the soft starlight of woman's high ideals continue to gleam on the thorny path of the thinker Israel; may they never depart from Israel, those God-kissed women that draw inspiration at the sacred fount of poesy, and are consecrated by its limpid waters to give praise and thanksgiving to Him that reigns on high; may the poet's words ever remain applicable to the matrons and maidens of Israel:<sup>1</sup>

"Pure woman stands in life's turmoil  
A rose in leafy bower;  
Her aspirations and her toil  
Are tinted like a flower.

Her thoughts are pious, kind, and true,  
In evil have no part;  
A glimpse of empyrean blue  
Is seen within her heart."

<sup>1</sup> By Julius Rodenberg.

## MOSES MAIMONIDES

"Who is Maimonides? For my part, I confess that I have merely heard the name." This naïve admission was not long since made by a well-known French writer in discussing the subject of a prize-essay, "Upon the Philosophy of Maimonides," announced by the *académie universitaire* of Paris. What short memories the French have for the names of foreign scholars! When the proposed subject was submitted to the French minister of instruction, he probably asked himself the same question; but he was not at a loss for an answer; he simply substituted Spinoza for Maimonides. To be sure, Spinoza's philosophy is somewhat better known than that of Maimonides. But why should a minister of instruction take that into consideration? The minister and the author—both presumably over twenty-five years of age—might have heard this very question propounded and answered some years before. They might have known that their colleague Victor Cousin, to save Descartes from the disgrace of having stood sponsor to Spinozism, had established a far-fetched connection between the Dutch philosopher and the Spanish, pronouncing Spinoza the devoted disciple of Maimonides. Perhaps they might have been expected to know, too, that Solo-

mon Munk, through his French translation of Maimonides' last work, had made it possible for modern thinkers to approach the Jewish philosopher, and that soon after this translation was published, E. Saisset had written an article upon Jewish philosophy in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in which he gave a popular and detailed exposition of Maimonides' religious views. All this they did not know, and, had they known it, they surely would not have been so candid as the German thinker, Heinrich Ritter, who, in his "History of Christian Philosophy," frankly admits: "My impression was that mediæval philosophy was not indebted to Jewish metaphysicians for any original line of thought, but M. Munk's discovery convinced me of my mistake."<sup>1</sup>

Who was Maimonides? The question is certainly more justifiable upon German than upon French soil. In France, attention has been invited to his works, while in Germany, save in the circle of the learned, he is almost unknown. Even among Jews, who call him "Rambam," he is celebrated rather than known. It seems, then, that it may not be unprofitable to present an outline of the life and works of this philosopher of the middle ages, whom scholars have sought to connect with Spinoza, with Leibnitz, and even with Kant.<sup>2</sup>

While readers in general possess but little information about Maimonides himself, the period in

<sup>1</sup> Ritter, *Geschichte der christlichen Philosophie*, Vol. I., p. 610 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Joel, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. II., p. 9.

which he lived, and which derives much of its brilliancy and importance from him, is well known, and has come to be a favorite subject with modern writers. That period was a very dreamland of culture. Under enlightened caliphs, the Arabs in Spain developed a civilization which, during the whole of the middle ages up to the Renaissance, exercised pregnant influence upon every department of human knowledge. A dreamland, in truth, it appears to be, when we reflect that the descendants of a highly cultured people, the teachers of Europe in many sciences, are now wandering in African wilds, nomads, who know of the glories of their past only through a confused legend, holding out to them the extravagant hope that the banner of the Prophet may again wave from the cathedral of Granada. Yet this Spanish-Arabic period bequeathed to us such magnificent tokens of architectural skill, of scientific research, and of philosophic thought, that far from regarding it as fancy's dream, we know it to be one of the corner-stones of civilization.

Prominent among the great men of this period was the Jew Moses ben Maimon, or as he was called in Arabic, Abu Amran Musa ibn Maimûn Obaid Allah (1135-1204). It may be said that he represented the full measure of the scientific attainments of the age at the close of which he stood—an age whose culture comprised the whole circle of sciences then known, and whose conscious goal was the reconciliation of religion and philosophy. The sturdier the growth of the spirit of inquiry, the more



many enemies against him, his influence grew in the congregations of his town and province. From all sides questions were addressed to him, and when religious points were under debate, his opinion usually decided the issue. At his death at the age of seventy great mourning prevailed in Israel. His mortal remains were moved to Tiberias, and a legend reports that Bedouins attacked the funeral train. Finding it impossible to move the coffin from the spot, they joined the Jews, and followed the great man to his last resting-place. The deep reverence accorded him both by the moral sense and the exuberant fancy of his race is best expressed in the brief eulogy of the saying, now become almost a proverb: "From Moses, the Prophet, to Moses ben Maimon, there appeared none like unto Moses."

In three different spheres Maimonides' work produced important results. First in order stand his services to his fellow-believers. For them he compiled the great Codex, the first systematic arrangement, upon the basis of Talmudic tradition, of all the ordinances and tenets of Judaism. He gave them a system of ethics which even now should be prized, because it inculcates the highest possible ethical views and the most ideal conception of man's duties in life. He explained to them, almost seven hundred years ago, Islam's service to mankind, and the mission Christianity was appointed by Providence to accomplish.

His early writings reveal the fundamental prin-

ciples of his subsequent literary work. An astronomical treatise on the Jewish calendar, written in his early youth, illustrates his love of system, but his peculiar method of thinking and working is best shown in the two works that followed. The first is a commentary on parts of the Talmud, probably meant to present such conclusions of the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud as affect the practices of Judaism. The second is his Arabic commentary on the Mishna. He explains the Mishna simply and clearly from a strictly rabbinical point of view—a point of view which he never relinquished, permitting a deviation only in questions not affecting conduct. Master of the abundant material of Jewish literature, he felt it to be one of the most important tasks of the age to simplify, by methodical treatment, the study of the mass of written and traditional religious laws, accumulated in the course of centuries. It is this work that contains the attempt, praised by some, condemned by others, to establish articles of the Jewish faith, the Bible being used in authentication. Thirteen articles of faith were thus established. The first five naturally define the God-idea: Article 1 declares the existence of God, 2, His unity, 3, His immateriality, 4, His eternity, 5, that unto Him alone, to whom all created life owes its being, human adoration is due; the next four treat of revelation: 6, of revelations made through prophets in general, 7, of the revelation made through Moses, 8, of the divine origin of the Law, 9, of the perfection of the Law, and its

eternally binding force; and the rest dwell upon the divine government of the world: 10, Divine Providence, 11, reward and punishment, here and hereafter, 12, Messianic promises and hopes, and 13, resurrection.

Maimonides' high reputation among his own people is attested by his letters and responses, containing detailed answers to vexed religious questions. An especially valuable letter is the one upon "Enforced Apostasy," *Iggereth ha-Sh'mad*. He advises an inquirer what to do when menaced by religious persecutions. Is one to save life by accepting, or to court death by refusing to embrace, the Mohammedan faith? Maimonides' opinion is summed up in the words: "The solution which I always recommend to my friends and those consulting me is, to leave such regions, and to turn to a place in which religion can be practiced without fear of persecution. No considerations of danger, of property, or of family should prevent one from carrying out this purpose. The divine Law stands in higher esteem with the wise than the haphazard gifts of fortune. These pass away, the former remains." His responses as well as his most important works bear the impress of a sane, well-ordered mind, of a lofty intellect, dwelling only upon what is truly great.

Also his second famous work, the above-mentioned Hebrew Codex, *Mishneh Torah*, "Recapitulation of the Law," was written in the interest of his brethren in faith. Its fourteen divisions treat of knowledge,

love, the festivals, marriage laws, sanctifications, vows, seeds, Temple-service, sacrifices, purifications, damages, purchase and sale, courts, and judges. "My work is such," says Maimonides, "that my book in connection with the Bible will enable a student to dispense with the Talmud." From whatever point of view this work may be regarded, it must be admitted that Maimonides carried out his plan with signal success, and that it is the only one by which method could have been introduced into the manifold departments of Jewish religious lore. But it is obvious that the thinker had not yet reached the goal of his desires. In consonance with his fundamental principle, a scientific systemization of religious laws had to be followed up by an explanation of revealed religion and Greek-Arabic philosophy, and by the attempt to bring about a reconciliation between them.

Before we enter upon this his greatest book, it is well to dispose of the second phase of his work, his activity as a medical writer. Maimonides treated medicine as a science, a view not usual in those days. The body of facts relating to medicine he classified, as he had systematized the religious laws of the Talmud. In his methodical way, he also edited the writings of Galen, the medical oracle of the middle ages, and his own medical aphorisms and treatises are marked by the same love of system. It seems that he had the intention to prepare a medical codex to serve a purpose similar to that of his religious code. How great a reputation he enjoyed among



Mohammedan physicians is shown by the extravagantly enthusiastic verses of an Arabic poet:

“Of body’s ills doth Galen’s art relieve,  
Maimonides cures mind and body both,—  
His wisdom heals disease and ignorance.  
And should the moon invoke his skill and art,  
Her spots, when full her orb, would disappear;  
He’d fill her breach, when time doth inroads make,  
And cure her, too, of pallor caused by earth.”

Maimonides’ real greatness, however, must be sought in his philosophic work. Despite the wide gap between our intellectual attitude and the philosophic views to which Maimonides gave fullest expression, we can properly appreciate his achievements and his intellectual grasp by judging him with reference to his own time. When we realize that he absorbed all the thought-currents of his time, that he was their faithful expounder, and that, at the same time, he was gifted with an accurate, historic instinct, making him wholly objective, we shall recognize in him “the genius of his peculiar epoch become incarnate.” The work containing Maimonides’ deepest thought and the sum of his knowledge and erudition was written in Arabic under the name *Dalalat al-Hāirin*. In Hebrew it is known as *Moreh Nebuchim*, in Latin, as *Doctor Perplexorum*, and in English as the “Guide of the Perplexed.” To this book we shall now devote our attention. The original Arabic text was supposed, along with many other literary treasures of the middle ages, to be lost, until

Solomon Munk, the blind *savant* with clear vision, discovered it in the library at Paris, and published it. But in its Hebrew translation the book created a stir, which subsided only with its public burning at Montpellier early in the thirteenth century. The Latin translation we owe to Buxtorf; the German is, I believe, incomplete, and can hardly be said to give evidence of ripe scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

The question that naturally suggests itself is: What does the book contain? Does it establish a new system of philosophy? Is it a cyclopædia of the sciences, such as the Arab schools of that day were wont to produce? Neither the one nor the other. The "Guide of the Perplexed" is a system of rational theology upon a philosophic basis, a book not intended for novices, but for thinkers, for such minds as know how to penetrate the profound meaning of tradition, as the author says in a prefatory letter addressed to Joseph ibn Aknin, his favorite disciple. He believes that even those to whom the book appeals are often puzzled and confused by the apparent inconsistencies between the literal interpretation of the Bible and the evidence of reason, that they do not know whether to take Scriptural expressions as symbolic or allegoric, or to accept them in their literal meaning, and that they fall a prey to doubt, and long for a guide. Maimonides is prepared to lead them to an eminence on which religion and philosophy meet in perfect harmony.

<sup>1</sup> "The Guide of the Perplexed," the English translation, consulted in this work, was made by M. Friedländer, Ph. D., (London, Trübner & Co., 1885). [Tr.]

Educated in the school of Arabic philosophers, notably under the influence of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Maimonides paid hero-worship to Aristotle, the autocrat of the middle ages in the realm of speculation. There is no question that the dominion wielded by the Greek philosopher throughout mediæval times, and the influence which he exercises even now, are chiefly attributable to the Arabs, and beside them, pre-eminently to Maimonides. For him, Aristotle was second in authority only to the Bible. A rational interpretation of the Bible, in his opinion, meant its interpretation from an Aristotelian point of view. Still, he does not consider Aristotle other than a thinker like himself, not by any means the infallible "organ of reason." The moment he discovers that a peripatetic principle is in direct and irreconcilable conflict with his religious convictions, he parts company with it, let the effort cost what it may. For, above all, Maimonides was a faithful Jew, striving to reach a spiritual conception of his religion, and to assign to theology the place in his estimation belonging to it in the realm of science. He stands forth as the most eminent intermediary between Greek-Arabic thought and Christian scholasticism. A century later, the most prominent of the schoolmen endeavored, in the same way as Maimonides, to reconcile divine with human wisdom as manifested by Aristotle. It has been demonstrated that Maimonides was followed by both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, and that the new aims of philosophy, conceived at the

beginning of the thirteenth century, are, in part, to be traced to the influence of "Rabbi Moses of Egypt," as Maimonides was called by the first of these two celebrated doctors of the Church.

What a marvellous picture is presented by the unfolding of the Aristotelian idea in its passage through the ages! And one of the most attractive figures on the canvas is Maimonides. Let us see how he undertakes to guide the perplexed. His path is marked out for him by the Bible. Its first few verses suffice to puzzle the believing thinker. It says: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." What! Is this expression to be taken literally? Impossible! To conceive of God as such that a being can be made in His image, is to conceive of Him as a corporeal substance. But God is an invisible, immaterial Intelligence. Reason teaches this, and the sacred Book itself prohibits image-worship. On this point Aristotle and the Bible are in accord. The inference is that in the Holy Scriptures there are many metaphors and words with a double or allegoric sense. Such is the case with the word "image." It has two meanings, the one usual and obvious, the other figurative. Here the word must be taken in its figurative sense. God is conceived as the highest Reason, and as reason is the specific attribute which characterizes the human mind, it follows that man, by virtue of his possession of reason, resembles God, and the more fully he realizes the ideal of Reason, the closer does he approach the form and likeness of



God. Such is Maimonides' method of reasoning. He does not build up a new system of philosophy, he adopts an existing system. Beginning with Bible exegesis, he leads us, step by step, up to the lofty goal at which philosophy and faith are linked in perfect harmony.

The arguments for the existence, unity, and incorporeity of God divide the Arabic philosophers into two schools. Maimonides naturally espoused the view permitting the most exalted conception of God, that is, the conception of God free from human attributes. He recognizes none but negative attributes; in other words, he defines God by means of negations only. For instance, asserting that the Supreme Being is omniscient or omnipotent, is not investing Him with a positive attribute, it is simply denying imperfection. The student knows that in the history of the doctrine of attributes, the recognition of negative attributes marks a great advance in philosophic reasoning. Maimonides holds that the conception of the Deity as a pure abstraction is the only one truly philosophic. His evidences for the existence, the immateriality, and the unity of God, are conceived in the same spirit. In offering them he follows Aristotle's reasoning closely, adding only one other proof, the cosmological, which he took from his teacher, the Arab Avicenna. He logically reaches this proof by more explicitly defining the God-idea, and, at the same time, taking into consideration the nature of the world of things and their relation to one another. Acquainted with

Ptolemy's "Almagest" and with the investigations of the Arabs, he naturally surpasses his Greek master in astronomical knowledge. In physical science, however, he gives undivided allegiance to the Aristotelian theory of a sublunary and a celestial world of spheres, the former composed of the sublunary elements in constantly shifting, perishable combinations, and the latter, of the stable, unchanging fifth substance (quintessence). But the question, how God moves these spheres, separates Maimonides from his master. His own answer has a Neoplatonic ring. He holds, with Aristotle, that there are as many separate Intelligences as spheres. Each sphere is supposed to aspire to the Intelligence which is the principle of its motion. The Arabic thinkers assumed ten such independent Intelligences, one animating each of the nine permanent spheres, and the tenth, called the "Active Intellect," influencing the sublunary world of matter. The existence of this tenth Intelligence is proved by the transition of our own intellect from possible existence to actuality, and by the varying forms of all transient things, whose matter at one time existed only in a potential state. Whenever the transition from potentiality to actuality occurs, there must be a cause. Inasmuch as the tenth Intelligence (*Sechel Hapoel*, Active Intellect) induces form, it must itself be form, inasmuch as it is the source of intellect, it is itself intellect. This is, of course, obscure to us, but we must remember that Maimonides would not have so charming and individual a personality,

were he not part and parcel of his time and the representative of its belief. Maimonides, having for once deviated from the peripatetic system, ventures to take another bold step away from it. He offers an explanation, different from Aristotle's, of the creation of the world. The latter repudiated the *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). Like modern philosophers, he pre-supposed the existence of an eternal "First substance" (*materia prima*). His Bible does not permit our rabbi to avail himself of this theory. It was reserved for the modern investigator to demonstrate how the Scriptural word, with some little manipulation, can be so twisted as to be made to harmonize with the theories of natural science. But to such trickery the pure-minded guide will not stoop. Besides, the acceptance of Aristotle's theory would rule out the intervention of miracles in the conduct of the world, and that Maimonides does not care to renounce. Right here his monotheistic convictions force him into direct opposition to the Greek as well as to the Arabic philosophers. Upon this subject, he brooked neither trifling nor compromise with reason. It is precisely his honesty that so exalted his teachings, that they have survived the lapse of centuries, and maintain a place in the pure atmosphere of modern philosophic thought.

According to Maimonides, man has absolute free-will, and God is absolutely just. Whatever good befalls man is reward, all his evil fortune, punishment. What Aristotle attributes to chance,

and the Mohammedan philosophers to Divine Will or Divine Wisdom, our rabbi traces to the *merits of man* as its cause. He does not admit any suffering to be unmerited, or that God ordains trials merely to indemnify the sufferer in this or the future world. Man's susceptibility to divine influence is measured by his intellectual endowment. Through his "intellect," he is directly connected with the "Active Intellect," and thus secures the grace of God, who embraces the infinite. Such views naturally lead to a conception of life in consonance with the purest ideals of morality, and they are the goal to which the "Guide" leads the perplexed. He teaches that the acquiring of high intellectual power, and the "possession of such notions as lead to true metaphysical opinions" about God, are "man's final object," and they constitute true human perfection. This it is that "gives him immortality," and confers upon him the dignity of manhood.

The highest degree of perfection, according to Maimonides, is reached by him who devotes all his thoughts and actions to perfecting himself in divine matters, and this highest degree he calls prophecy. He is probably the first philosopher to offer so rationalistic an explanation, and, on that account, it merits our attention. What had previously been regarded as supernatural inspiration, the "Guide" reduces to a psychological theory. "Prophecy," he says, "is, in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's



rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; it is the highest degree . . . of perfection man can attain; it consists in the most perfect development of the imaginative faculty." Maimonides distinguishes eleven degrees of inspiration, and three essential conditions of prophecy: 1. Perfection of the natural constitution of the imaginative faculty, 2. mental perfection, which may partially be acquired by training, and 3. moral perfection. Moses arrived at the highest degree of prophecy, because he understood the knowledge communicated to him without the medium of the imaginative faculty. This spiritual height having been scaled, the "Guide" needs but to take a step to reach revelation, in his estimation also an intellectual process: man's intellect rises to the Supreme Being.

In the third part of his work, Maimonides endeavors to reconcile the conclusions of philosophy with biblical laws and Talmudical traditions. His method is both original and valuable; indeed, this deserves to be considered the most important part of his work. Detailed exposition of his reasoning may prove irksome; we shall, therefore, consider it as briefly as possible.

Maimonides laid down one rule of interpretation which, almost without exception, proves applicable: The words of Holy Writ express different sets of ideas, bearing a certain relation to each other, the one set having reference to physical, the other to spiritual, qualities. By applying this rule, he thinks that nearly all discrepancies between the literal in-

terpretation of the Bible and his own philosophic theories disappear. Having passed over the domain of metaphysical speculation, he finally reaches the consideration of the practical side of the Bible, that is to say, the Mosaic legislation. These last investigations of his are attractive, not only by reason of the satisfactory method pursued, but chiefly from the fact that Maimonides, divesting himself of the conservatism of his contemporaries, ventures to inquire into the reasons of biblical laws. For many of them, he assigns local and historical reasons; many, he thinks, owe their origin to the desire to oppose the superstitious practices of early times and of the Sabeans, a mythical, primitive race; but all, he contends, are binding, and with this solemn asseveration, he puts the seal upon his completed work.

When Maimonides characterized the "Guide of the Perplexed" as "the true science of the Bible," he formed a just estimate of his own work. It has come to be the substructure of a rational theology based upon speculation. Maimonides cannot be said to have been very much ahead of his own age; but it is altogether certain that he attained the acme of the possibilities of the middle ages. In many respects there is a striking likeness between his life and work and those of the Arabic freethinker Averroës, whom we now know so well through Ernest Renan. While the Jewish theologian was composing his great work, the Arabic philosopher was writing his "Commentaries on Aristotle." The two had similar ends in view—the one to enthrone "the

Stagirite" as the autocrat of philosophy in the Mosque, the other, in the Synagogue. We have noted the fact that, some centuries later, the Church also entered the federation subject to Aristotelian rule. Albertus Magnus uses Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas joins him, and upon them depend the other schoolmen. Recent inquirers follow in their train. Philosophy's noblest votary, Benedict Spinoza himself, is influenced by Maimonides. He quotes frequently and at great length the finest passages of the "Guide." Again, Moses Mendelssohn built his system on the foundations offered by Maimonides, and an acute critic assures us that, in certain passages, Kant's religious philosophy breathes the spirit of Maimonides.<sup>1</sup>

The "Guide of the Perplexed" did not, however, meet with so gracious a reception in the Synagogue. There, Maimonides' philosophic system conjured up violent storms. The whole of an epoch, that following Maimonides' death, was absorbed in the conflict between philosophy and tradition. Controversial pamphlets without number have come down to us from those days. Enthusiasts eulogized, zealots decried. Maimonides' ambiguous expressions about bodily resurrection, seeming to indicate that he did not subscribe to the article of the creed on that subject, caused particularly acrimonious polemics. Meïr ben Todros ha-Levi, a Talmudist and poet of Toledo, denounced the equivocation in the following lines:

<sup>1</sup> Joel, *l. c.*

"If those that rise from death again must die,  
 For lot like theirs I ne'er should long and sigh.  
 If graves their bones shall once again confine,  
 I hope to stay where first they bury mine."

Naturally, Maimonides' followers were quick to retort:

"His name, forsooth, is Meïr 'Shining.'  
 How false ! since *light* he holds in small esteem.  
 Our language always contrast loveth,—  
*Twilight's* the name of ev'ning's doubtful gleam."

Another of Maimonides' opponents was the physician Judah Alfachar, who bore the hereditary title *Prince*. The following pasquinade is attributed to him:

"Forgive, O Amram's son, nor deem it crime,  
 That he, deception's master, bears thy name.  
*Nabi* we call the prophet of truths sublime,  
 Like him of Ba'al, who doth the truth defame."

Maimonides, in his supposed reply to the Prince, played upon the word *Chamor*, the Hebrew word for *ass*, the name of a Hivite prince mentioned in the Bible:

"High rank, I wot, we proudly claim  
 When sprung from noble ancestor ;  
 Henceforth my mule a *prince* I'll name  
 Since once a prince was called *Chamor*."

It seems altogether certain that this polemic rhyming is the fabrication of a later day, for we know that the controversies about Maimonides' opinions



in Spain and Provence broke out only after his death, when his chief work had spread far and wide in its Hebrew translation. The following stanza passed from mouth to mouth in northern France:

"Be silent, 'Guide,' from further speech refrain!  
Thus truth to us was never brought.  
Accursed who says that Holy Writ's a trope,  
And idle dreams what prophets taught."

Whereupon the Provençals returned:

"Thou fool, I pray thou wilt forbear,  
Nor enter on this consecrated ground.  
Or trope, or truth—or vision fair,  
Or only dream—for thee 'tis too profound."

The homage paid to Maimonides' memory in many instances produced most extravagant poetry. The following high-flown lines, outraging the canons of good taste recognized in Hebrew poetry, are supposed to be his epitaph:

"Here lies a man, yet not a man,  
And if a man, conceived by angels,  
By human mother only born to light;  
Perhaps himself a spirit pure—  
Not child by man and woman fostered—  
From God above an emanation bright."

Such hyperbole naturally challenged opposition, and Maimonides' opponents did not hesitate to give voice to their deep indignation, as in the following:

"Alas ! that man should dare  
To say, with reckless air,  
That Holy Scripture's but a dream of night ;  
That all we read therein  
Has truly never been,  
Is naught but sign of meaning recondite.  
And when God's wondrous deeds  
The haughty scorner reads,  
Contemtuously he cries, 'I trust my sight.'"

A cessation of hostilities came only in the fourteenth century. The "Guide" was then given its due meed of appreciation by the Jews. Later, Maimonides' memory was held in unbounded reverence, and to-day his "Guide of the Perplexed" is a manual of religious philosophy treasured by Judaism.

If we wish once more before parting from this earnest, noble thinker to review his work and attitude, we can best do it by applying to them the standard furnished by his own reply to all adverse critics of his writings: "In brief, such is my disposition. When a thought fills my mind, though I be able to express it so that only a single man among ten thousand, a thinker, is satisfied and elevated by it, while the common crowd condemns it as absurd, I boldly and frankly speak the word that enlightens the wise, never fearing the censure of the ignorant herd."

This was Maimonides—he of pure thought, of noble purpose; imbued with enthusiasm for his faith, with love for science; ruled by the loftiest moral principles; full of disinterested love and the milk of

human kindness in his intercourse with those of other faiths and other views; an eagle-eyed thinker, in whom were focused and harmoniously blended the last rays of the declining sun of Arabic-Jewish-Spanish culture.

## JEWISH TROUBADOURS AND MINNE- SINGERS

A great tournament at the court of Pedro I. Deafening fanfares invite courtiers and cavaliers to participate in the festivities. In the brilliant sunshine gleam the lances of the knights, glitter the spears of the hidalgos. Gallant paladins escort black-eyed beauties to the elevated balcony, on which, upon a high-raised throne, under a gilded canopy, surrounded by courtiers, sit Blanche de Bourbon and her illustrious lord Dom Pedro, with Doña Maria de Padilla, the lady of his choice, at his left. Three times the trumpets have sounded, announcing the approach of the troubadours gathered from all parts of Castile to compete with one another in song. Behold! a venerable old man, with silvery white beard flowing down upon his breast, seeks to extricate himself from the crowd. With admiring gaze the people respectfully make way, and enthusiastically greet him: "Rabbi Don Santo! Rabbi Don Santo!"

The troubadour makes a low obeisance before the throne. Dom Pedro nods encouragement, Maria de Padilla smiles graciously, only Doña Blanca's pallid face remains immobile. The hoary bard begins his song:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cmp. Kayserling, *Sephardim*, p. 23 ff.



"My noble king and mighty lord,  
 A discourse hear most true;  
 'Tis Santob brings your Grace the word,  
 Of Carrion's town the Jew.

In plainest verse my thought I tell,  
 With gloss and moral free,  
 Drawn from Philosophy's pure well,  
 As onward you may see."<sup>1</sup>

A murmur of approval runs through the crowd; grandees and hidalgos press closer to listen. In well-turned verse, fraught with worldly-wise lessons, and indifferent whether his hortations meet with praise or with censure, the poet continues to pour out words of counsel and moral teachings, alike for king, nobles, and people.

Who is this Rabbi Don Santob? We know very little about him, yet, with the help of "bright-eyed fancy," enough to paint his picture. The real name of this Jew from Carrion de los Condes, a city of northern Spain, who lived under Alfonso XI. and Peter the Cruel, was, of course, not Santob, but Shem-Tob. Under Alfonso the intellectual life of Spain developed to a considerable degree, and in Spain, as almost everywhere, we find Jews in sympathy with the first intellectual strivings of the nation. They have a share in the development of all Romance languages and literatures. Ibn Al-fange, a Moorish Jew, after his conversion a high official, wrote the first "Chronicle of the Cid," the

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Ticknor. [Tr.]

oldest source of the oft-repeated biography, thus furnishing material to subsequent Spanish poets and historians. Valentin Barruchius (Baruch), of Toledo, composed, probably in the twelfth century, in pure, choice Latin, the romance *Comte Lyonnais, Palanus*, which spread all over Europe, affording modern poets subject-matter for great tragedies, and forming the groundwork for one of the classics of Spanish literature. A little later, Petrus Alphonsus (Moses Sephardi) wrote his *Disciplina Clericalis*, the first collection of tales in the Oriental manner, the model of all future collections of the kind.

Three of the most important works of Spanish literature, then, are products of Jewish authorship. This fact prepares the student to find a Jew among the Castilian troubadours of the fourteenth century, the period of greatest literary activity. The Jewish spirit was by no means antagonistic to the poetry of the Provençal troubadours. In his didactic poem, *Chotham Tochnith* ("The Seal of Perfection," together with "The Flaming Sword"), Abraham Bedersi, that is, of Béziers (1305), challenges his co-religionists to a poetic combat. He details the rules of the tournament, and it is evident that he is well acquainted with all the minutæ of the *jeu parti* and the *tenso* (song of dispute) of the Provençal singers, and would willingly imitate their *sirventes* (moral and political song). His plaint over the decadence of poetry among the Jews is characteristic: "Where now are the marvels of Hebrew poetry? Mayhap thou'lt find them in the Provençal

or Romance. Aye, in Folquet's verses is manna, and from the lips of Cardinal is wafted the perfume of crocus and nard"—Folquet de Lunel and Peire Cardinal being the last great representatives of Provençal troubadour poetry. Later on, neo-Hebraic poets again show acquaintance with the regulations governing song-combats and courts of love. Pious Bible exegetes, like Samuel ben Meïr, do not disdain to speak of the *partimens* of the troubadours, "in which lovers talk to each other, and by turns take up the discourse." One of his school, a *Tossafist*, goes so far as to press into service the day's fashion in explaining the meaning of a verse in the "Song of Songs": "To this day lovers treasure their mistress' locks as love-tokens." It seems, too, that Provençal romances were heard, and their great poets welcomed, in the houses of Jews, who did not scruple occasionally to use their melodies in the synagogue service.

National customs, then, took root in Israel; but that Jewish elements should have become incorporated into Spanish literature is more remarkable, may, indeed, be called marvellous. Yet, from one point of view, it is not astonishing. The whole of mediæval Spanish literature is nothing more than the handmaiden of Christianity. Spanish poetry is completely dominated by Catholicism; it is in reality only an expression of reverence for Christian institutions. An extreme naturally induces a counter-current; so here, by the side of rigid orthodoxy, we meet with latitudinarianism and secular delight

in the good things of life. For instance, that jolly rogue, the archpriest of Hita, by way of relaxation from the tenseness of church discipline, takes to composing *dansas* and *baladas* for the rich Jewish bankers of his town. He and his contemporaries have much to say about Jewish generosity—unfortunately, much, too, about Jewish wealth and pomp. Jewish women, a Jewish chronicler relates, are tricked out with finery, as “sumptuously as the pope’s mules.” It goes without saying that, along with these accounts, we have frequent wailing about defection from the faith and neglect of the Law. Old Akiba is right: “History repeats itself!” (“*Es ist alles schon einmal da gewesen!*”).

Such were the times of Santob de Carrion. Our first information about him comes from the Marquis de Santillana, one of the early patrons and leaders of Spanish literature. He says, “In my grandfather’s time there was a Jew, Rabbi Santob, who wrote many excellent things, among them *Proverbios Morales* (Moral Proverbs), truly commendable in spirit. A great troubadour, he ranks among the most celebrated poets of Spain.” Despite this high praise, the marquis feels constrained to apologize for having quoted a passage from Santob’s work. His praise is endorsed by the critics. It is commonly conceded that his *Consejos y Documentos al Rey Dom Pedro* (“Counsel and Instruction to King Dom Pedro”), consisting of six hundred and twenty-eight romances, deserves a place among the best creations of Castilian poetry, which, in form



and substance, owes not a little to Rabbi Santob. A valuable manuscript at the Escorial in Madrid contains his *Consejos* and two other works, *La Doctrina Christiana* and *Dansa General*. A careless copyist called the whole collection "Rabbi Santob's Book," so giving rise to the mistake of Spanish critics, who believe that Rabbi Santob, indisputably the author of *Consejos*, became a convert to Christianity, and wrote, after his conversion, the didactic poem on doctrinal Christianity, and perhaps also the first "Dance of Death."<sup>1</sup> It was reserved for the acuteness of German criticism to expose the error of this hypothesis. Of the three works, only *Consejos* belongs to Rabbi Santob, the others were accidentally bound with it. In passing, the interesting circumstance may be noted that in the first "Dance of Death" a bearded rabbi (*Rabbi barbudo*) dances toward the universal goal between a priest and an usurer. Santob de Carrion remained a Jew. His *consejos*, written when he was advanced in age, are pervaded by loyalty to his king, but no less to his faith, which he openly professed at the royal court, and whose spiritual treasures he adroitly turned to poetic uses.

Santob, it is interesting to observe, was not a writer of erotic poetry. He composed poems on moral subjects only, social satires and denunciations of vice. Such are the *consejos*. It is in his capacity as a preacher of morality that Santob is to be

<sup>1</sup>Cmp. F. Wolf, *Studien zur Geschichte der spanischen National-literatur*, p. 236 ff.

classed among troubadours. First he addressed himself, with becoming deference, to the king, leading him to consider God's omnipotence:

"As great, 'twixt heav'n and earth the space—  
That ether pure and blue—  
So great is God's forgiving grace  
Your sins to lift from you.

And with His vast and wondrous might  
He does His deeds of power;  
But yours are puny in His sight,  
For strength is not man's dower."

At that time it required more than ordinary courage to address a king in this fashion; but Santob was old and poor, and having nothing to lose, could risk losing everything. A democratic strain runs through his verses; he delights in aiming his satires at the rich, the high-born, and the powerful, and takes pride in his poverty and his fame as a poet:

"I will not have you think me less  
Than others of my faith,  
Who live on a generous king's largess,  
Forsworn at every breath.

And if you deem my teachings true,  
Reject them not with hate,  
Because a minstrel sings to you  
Who's not of knight's estate.

The fragrant, waving reed grows tall  
From feeble root and thin,  
And uncouth worms that lowly crawl  
Most lustrous silk do spin.

Because beside a thorn it grows  
 The rose is not less fair ;  
 Though wine from gnarlèd branches flows,  
 'Tis sweet beyond compare.

The goshawk, know, can soar on high,  
 Yet low he nests his brood.  
 A Jew true precepts doth apply,  
 Are they therefore less good ?

Some Jews there are with slavish mind  
 Who fear, are mute, and meek.  
 My soul to truth is so inclined  
 That all I feel I speak.

There often comes a meaning home  
 Through simple verse and plain,  
 While in the heavy, bulky tome  
 We find of truth no grain.

Full oft a man with furrowed front,  
 Whom grief hath rendered grave,  
 Whose views of life are honest, blunt,  
 Both fool is called and knave."

It is surely not unwarranted to assume that from these confessions the data of Santob's biography may be gathered.

Now as to Santob's relation to Judaism. Doubtless he was a faithful Jew, for the views of life and the world laid down in his poems rest on the Bible, the Talmud, and the Midrash. With the fearlessness of conviction he meets the king and the people, denouncing the follies of both. Some of his romances

sound precisely like stories from the Haggada, so skilfully does he clothe his counsel in the gnomic style of the Bible and the Talmud. This characteristic is particularly well shown in his verses on friendship, into which he has woven the phraseology of the Proverbs:

“What treasure greater than a friend  
Who close to us hath grown?  
Blind fate no bitt’rer lot can send  
Than bid us walk alone.

For solitude doth cause a dearth  
Of fruitful, blessed thought.  
The wise would pray to leave this earth,  
If none their friendship sought.

Yet sad though loneliness may be,  
That friendship surely shun  
That feigns to love, and inwardly  
Betrays affections won.”

The poem closes with a prayer for the king, who certainly could not have taken offense at Santob’s frankness:

“May God preserve our lord and king  
With grace omnipotent,  
Remove from us each evil thing,  
And blessed peace augment.

The nations loyally allied  
Our empire to exalt,  
May God, in whom we all confide,  
From plague keep and assault.



If God will answer my request,  
Then will be paid his due—  
Your noble father's last behest—  
To Santob, Carrion's Jew."

Our troubadour's poetry shows that he was devotedly attached to his prince, enthusiastically loved his country, and was unfalteringly loyal to his faith; that he told the king honest, wholesome truths disguised in verse; that he took no pains to conceal his scorn of those who, with base servility, bowed to the ruling faith, and permitted its yoke to be put upon their necks; that he felt himself the peer of the high in rank, and the wealthy in the goods of this world; that he censured, with incisive criticism, the vices of his Spanish and his Jewish contemporaries—all of which is calculated to inspire us with admiration for the Jewish troubadour, whose manliness enabled him to meet his detractors boldly, as in the verses quoted above:

"Because beside a thorn it grows,  
The rose is not less fair;  
Though wine from gnarlèd branches flows,  
'Tis sweet beyond compare.

A Jew true precepts doth apply,  
Are they therefore less good?"

History does not tell us whether Pedro rewarded the Jewish troubadour as the latter, if we may judge by the end of his poem, had expected. Our accounts of his life are meagre; even his fellow-be-

lievers do not make mention of him. We do know, however, that the poor poet's prayers for his sovereign, his petitions for the weal and the glory of his country were not granted. Pedro lost his life by violence, quarrels about the succession and civil wars convulsed the land, and weakened the royal power. Its decline marked the end of the peace and happiness of the Jew on Castilian soil.

As times grew worse, and persecutions of the Jews in Christian Spain became frequent, many forsook the faith of their fathers, to bask in the sunshine of the Church, who treated proselytes with distinguished favor. The example of the first Jewish troubadour did not find imitators. Among the converts were many poets, notably Juan Alfonso de Bæna, who, in the fifteenth century, collected the oldest troubadour poetry, including his own poems and satires, and the writings of the Jewish physician Don Moses Zarzal, into a *cancionera general*. Like many apostates, he sought to prove his devotion to the new faith by mocking at and reviling his former brethren. The attacked were not slow to answer in kind, and the Christian world of poets and bards joined the latter in deriding the neophytes. Spanish literature was not the loser by these combats, whose description belongs to general literary criticism. Lyric poetry, until then dry, serious, and solemn, was infused by the satirist with flashing wit and whimsical spirit, and throwing off its connection with the drama, developed into an independent species of poetry.

The last like the first of Spanish troubadours was a Jew,<sup>1</sup> Antonio di Montoro (Moro), *el ropero* (the tailor), of Cordova, of whom a contemporary says,

"A man of repute and lofty fame ;  
As poet, he puts many to shame ;  
Anton di Montoro is his name."

The tailor-poet was exposed to attacks, too. A high and mighty Spanish *caballero* addresses him as

"You Cohn, you cur,  
You miserable Jew,  
You wicked usurer."

It must be admitted that he parries these thrusts with weak, apologetic appeals, preserved in his *Respuestas* (Rhymed Answers). He claims his high-born foe's sympathy by telling him that he has sons, grandchildren, a poor, old father, and a marriageable daughter. In extenuation of his cowardice it should be remembered that Antonio di Montoro lived during a reign of terror, under Ferdinand and Isabella, when his race and his faith were exposed to most frightful persecution. All the more noteworthy is it that he had the courage to address the queen in behalf of his faith. He laments plaintively that despite his sixty years he has not been able to eradicate all traces of his descent (*creato de su origen*), and turns his irony against himself:

<sup>1</sup> Cmp. Kayserling, *l. c.* p. 85 ff.

“Ropero, so sad and so forlorn,  
 Now thou feelest pain and scorn.  
 Until sixty years had flown,  
 Thou couldst say to every one,  
 ‘Nothing wicked have I known.’

Christian convert hast thou turned,  
*Credo* thou to say hast learned;  
 Willing art now bold to view  
 Plates of ham—no more askew.  
 Mass thou hearest,  
 Church reverest,  
 Genuflexions makest,  
 Other alien customs takest.  
 Now thou, too, mayst persecute  
 Those poor wretches, like a brute.”

“Those poor wretches” were his brethren in faith in the fair Spanish land. With a jarring discord ends the history of the Jews in Spain. On the ninth of Ab, 1492, three hundred thousand Jews left the land to which they had given its first and its last troubadour. The irony of fate directed that at the selfsame time Christopher Columbus should embark for unknown lands, and eventually reach America, a new world, the refuge of all who suffer, wherein thought was destined to grow strong enough “to vanquish arrogance and injustice without recourse to arrogance and injustice”—a new illustration of the old verse: “Behold, he slumbereth not, and he sleepeth not—the keeper of Israel.”

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A great tournament at the court of the lords of Trimberg, the Franconian town on the Saale! From high battlements stream the pennons of the noble race, announcing rare festivities to all the country round. The mountain-side is astir with knights equipped with helmet, shield, and lance, and attended by pages and armor-bearers, minnesingers and minstrels. Yonder is Walther von der Vogelweide, engaged in earnest conversation with Wolfram von Eschenbach, Otto von Botenlaube, Hildebold von Schwanegau, and Reinmar von Brennenberg. In that group of notables, curiously enough, we discern a Jew, whose beautiful features reflect harmonious soul life.

"Süsskind von Trimberg," they call him, and when the pleasure of the feast in the lordly hall of the castle is to be heightened by song and music, he too steps forth, with fearlessness and dignity, to sing of freedom of thought, to the prevalence of which in this company the despised Jew owed his admission to a circle of knights and poets:<sup>1</sup>

"O thought! free gift to humankind!  
By thee both fools and wise are led,  
But who thy paths hath all defined,  
A man he is in heart and head.  
With thee, his weakness being fled,  
He can both stone and steel command,  
Thy pinions bear him o'er the land.

<sup>1</sup> Livius Fürst in *Illustrierte Monatshefte für die gesammten Interessen des Judenthums*, Vol. I., p. 14 ff. Cmp. also, Hagen, *Minnesänger*, Vol. II., p. 258, Vol. IV., p. 536 ff., and W. Goldbaum, *Entlegene Culturen*, p. 275 ff.

O thought that swifter art than light,  
 That mightier art than tempest's roar !  
 Didst thou not raise me in thy flight,  
 What were my song, my minstrel lore,  
 And what the gold from *Minne's* store ?  
 Beyond the heights an eagle vaunts,  
 O bear me to the spirit's haunts ! ”

His song meets with the approval of the knights, who give generous encouragement to the minstrel. Raising his eyes to the proud, beautiful mistress of the castle, he again strikes his lyre and sings:

“ Pure woman is to man a crown,  
 For her he strives to win renown.  
 Did she not grace and animate,  
 How mean and low the castle great !  
 By true companionship, the wife  
 Makes blithe and free a man's whole life ;  
 Her light turns bright the darkest day.  
 Her praise and worth I'll sing alway.”

The lady inclines her fair head in token of thanks, and the lord of castle Trimberg fills the golden goblet, and hands it, the mark of honor, to the poet, who drains it, and then modestly steps back into the circle of his compeers. Now we have leisure to examine the rare man.—

Rüdiger Manesse, a town councillor of Zürich in the fourteenth century, raised a beautiful monument to bardic art in a manuscript work, executed at his order, containing the songs of one hundred and forty poets, living between the twelfth and the fourteenth century. Among the authors are kings,

princes, noblemen of high rank and low, burgher-poets, and the Jew Süsskind von Trimberg. Each poet's productions are accompanied by illustrations, not authentic portraits, but a series of vivid representations of scenes of knight-errantry. There are scenes of war and peace, of combats, the chase, and tournaments with games, songs, and dance. We see the storming of a castle of Love (*Minneburg*)—lovers fleeing, lovers separated, love triumphant. Heinrich von Veldeke reclines upon a bank of roses; Friedrich von Hausen is on board a boat; Walther von der Vogelweide sits musing on a wayside stone; Wolfram von Eschenbach stands armed, with visor closed, next to his caparisoned horse, as though about to mount. Among the portraits of the knights and bards is Süsskind von Trimberg's. How does Rüdiger Manesse represent him? As a long-bearded Jew, on his head a yellow, funnel-shaped hat, the badge of distinction decreed by Pope Innocent III. to be worn by Jews. That is all! and save what we may infer from his six poems preserved by the history of literature, pretty much all, too, known of Süsskind von Trimberg.

Was it the heedlessness of the compiler that associated the Jew with this merry company, in which he was as much out of place as a Gothic spire on a synagogue? Süsskind came by the privilege fairly. Throughout the middle ages the Jews of Germany were permeated with the culture of their native land, and were keenly concerned in the development of its poetry. A still more important cir-

cumstance is the spirit of tolerance and humanity that pervades Middle High German poetry. Wolfram von Eschenbach based his *Parzival*, the herald of "Nathan the Wise," on the idea of the brotherhood of man; Walther von der Vogelweide ranged Christians, Jews, and Mohammedans together as children of the one God; and Freidank, reflecting that God lets His sun shine on the confessors of all creeds, went so far as to repudiate the doctrine of the eternal damnation of Jews. This trend of thought, characterizing both Jews and Christians, suffices to explain how, in Germany, and at the very time in which the teachers of the Church were reviling "the mad Jews, who ought to be hewn down like dogs," it was possible for a Jew to be a minnesinger, a minstrel among minstrels, and abundantly accounts for Süsskind von Trimberg's association with knights and ladies. Süsskind, then, doubtless journeyed with his brother-poets from castle to castle; yet our imagination would be leading us astray, were we to accept literally the words of the enthusiastic historian Graetz, and with him believe that "on vine-clad hills, seated in the circle of noble knights and fair dames, a beaker of wine at his side, his lyre in his hand, he sang his polished verses of love's joys and trials, love's hopes and fears, and then awaited the largesses that bought his daily bread."

Süsskind's poems are not at all like the joyous, rollicking songs his mates carolled forth; they are sad and serious, tender and chaste. Of love there is

<sup>1</sup> Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, Vol. VI., p. 257.



not a word. A minnesinger and a Jew—irreconcilable opposites! A minnesinger must be a knight wooing his lady-love, whose colors he wears at the tournaments, and for whose sake he undertakes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Jew's minstrelsy is a lament for Zion.

In fact what is *Minne*—this service of love? Is it not at bottom the cult of the Virgin Mary? Is it not, in a subtle, mysterious way, a phase of Christianity itself? How could it have appealed to the Jew Süßkind? True, the Jews, too, have an ideal of love in the "Song of Songs": "Lo, thou art beautiful, my beloved!" it says, but our old sages took the beloved to be the Synagogue. Of this love Princess Sabbath is the ideal, and the passion of the "Song of Songs" is separated from German *Minne* by the great gap between the soul life of the Semite and that of the Christian German. Unbridled sensuousness surges through the songs rising to the chambers of noble ladies. Kabbalistic passion glows in the mysterious love of the Jew. The German minstrel sings of love's sweetness and pain, of summer and its delights, of winter and its woes, now of joy and happiness, again of ill-starred fortunes. And what is the burden of the exiled Hebrew's song? Mysterious allusions, hidden in a tangle of highly polished, artificial, slow-moving rhymes, glorify, not a sweet womanly presence, but a fleeting vision, a shadow, whose elusive charms infatuated the poet in his dreams. Bright, joyous, blithe, unmeasured is the one; serious, gloomy, chaste, gentle, the other.

Yet, Süsskind von Trimberg was at once a Jew and a minnesinger. Who can fathom a poet's soul? Who can follow his thoughts as they fly hither and thither, like the thread in a weaver's shuttle, fashioning themselves into a golden web? The minnesingers enlisted in love's cause, yet none the less in war and the defense of truth, and for the last Süsskind von Trimberg did valiant service. The poems of his earliest period, the blithesome days of youth, have not survived. Those that we have bear the stamp of sorrow and trouble, the gifts of advanced years. With self-contemptuous bitterness, he bewails his sad lot:

"I seek and nothing find,—  
That makes me sigh and sigh.  
Lord Lackfood presses me,  
Of hunger sure I'll die ;  
My wife, my child go supperless,  
My butler is Sir Meagreiness."

Süsskind von Trimberg's poems also breathe the spirit of Hebrew literature, and have drawn material from the legend world of the Haggada. For the praise of his faithful wife he borrows the words of Solomon, and the psalm-like rhythm of his best songs recalls the familiar strains of our evening-prayer:

"Almighty God ! That shinest with the sun,  
That slumb'rest not when day grows into night !  
Thou Source of all, of tranquil peace and joy !  
Thou King of glory and majestic light !

Thou allgood Father ! Golden rays of day  
 And starry hosts thy praise to sing unite,  
 Creator of heav'n and earth, Eternal One,  
 That watchest ev'ry creature from Thy height ! ”

Like Santob, Süsskind was poor; like him, he denounced the rich, was proud and generous. With intrepid candor, he taught knights the meaning of true nobility—of the nobility of soul transcending nobility of birth—and of freedom of thought—freedom fettered by neither stone, nor steel, nor iron; and in the midst of their rioting and feasting, he ventured to put before them the solemn thought of death. His last production as a minnesinger was a prescription for a “virtue-electuary.” Then he went to dwell among his brethren, whom, indeed, he had not deserted in the pride of his youth:

“ Why should I wander sadly,  
 My harp within my hand,  
 O'er mountain, hill, and valley ?  
 What praise do I command ?

Full well they know the singer  
 Belongs to race accursed ;  
 Sweet *Minne* doth no longer  
 Reward me as at first.

Be silent, then, my lyre,  
 We sing 'fore lords in vain.  
 I'll leave the minstrels' choir,  
 And roam a Jew again.

My staff and hat I'll grasp, then,  
 And on my breast full low,  
 By Jewish custom olden  
 My grizzled beard shall grow.

My days I'll pass in quiet,—  
 Those left to me on earth—  
 Nor sing for those who not yet  
 Have learned a poet's worth."

Thus spake the Jewish poet, and dropped his lyre into the stream—in song and in life, a worthy son of his time, the disciple of Walther von der Vogelweide, the friend of Wolfram von Eschenbach—disciple and friend of the first to give utterance, in German song, to the idea of the brotherhood of man. Centuries ago, he found the longed-for quiet in Franconia, but no wreath lies on his grave, no stone marks the wanderer's resting-place. His poems have found an abiding home in the memory of posterity, and in the circle of the German minnesingers the Jew Süsskind forms a distinct link.

In a time when the idea of universal human brotherhood seems to be fading from the hearts of men, when they manifest a proneness to forget the share which, despite hatred and persecution, the Jew of every generation has had in German literature, in its romances of chivalry and its national epics, and in all the spiritual achievements of German genius, we may with just pride revive Süsskind's memory.—

On the wings of fancy let us return to our castle on the Saale. After the lapse of many years, the procession of poets again wends its way in the sunshine up the slope to the proud mansion of the Trimbergs. The venerable Walther von der Vogelweide again opens the festival of song. Wolfram



von Eschenbach, followed by a band of young disciples, musingly ascends the mountain-side. The ranks grow less serried, and in solitude and sadness, advances a man of noble form, his silvery beard flowing down upon his breast, a long cloak over his shoulder, and the peaked hat, the badge of the mediæval Jew, on his head. In his eye gleams a ray of the poet's grace, and his meditative glance looks into a distant future. Süsskind von Trimberg, to thee our greeting!

## HUMOR AND LOVE IN JEWISH POETRY

One of the most remarkable discoveries of the last ten years is that made in Paris by M. Ernest Renan. He maintains as the result of scientific research that the Semitic races, consequently also the Jews, are lacking in humor, in the capacity for laughter. The justice of the reproach might be denied outright, but a statement enunciated with so much scientific assurance involuntarily prompts questioning and investigation.

In such cases the Jews invariably resort to their first text-book, the Bible, whose pages seem to sustain M. Renan. In the Bible laughing is mentioned only twice, when the angel promises a son to Sarah, and again in the history of Samson, judge in Israel, who used foxes' tails as weapons against the Philistines. These are the only passages in which the Bible departs from its serious tone.

But classical antiquity was equally ignorant of humor as a distinct branch of art, as a peculiar attitude of the mind towards the problems of life. Aristophanes lived and could have written only in the days when Athenian institutions began to decay. It is personal discomfort and the trials and harassments of life that drive men to the ever serene, pure regions of humor for balm and healing. Fun and

comedy men have at all times understood—the history of Samson contains the germs of a mock-heroic poem—while it was impossible for humor, genuine humor, to find appreciation in the youth of mankind.

In those days of healthy reliance upon the senses, poetic spirits could obtain satisfaction only in love and in the praise of the good world and its Maker. The sombre line of division had not yet been introduced between the physical and the spiritual world, debasing this earth to a vale of tears, and consoling sinful man by the promise of a better land, whose manifold delights were described, but about which there was no precise knowledge, no traveller, as the Talmud aptly puts it, having ever returned to give us information about it. Those were the days of perfect harmony, when man crept close to nature to be taught untroubled joy in living. In such days, despite the storms assailing the young Israelitish nation, a poet, his heart filled with the sunshine of joy, his mind receptive, his eyes open wide to see the flowers unfold, the buds of the fig tree swell, the vine put forth leaves, and the pomegranate blossom unfurl its glowing petals, could carol forth the "Song of Songs," the most perfect, the most beautiful, the purest creation of Hebrew literature and the erotic poetry of all literatures—the song of songs of stormy passion, bidding defiance to ecclesiastical fetters, at once an epic and a drama, full of childlike tenderness and grace of feeling. Neither Greece, nor the rest of the Orient has produced anything to compare with its marvellous union of voluptuous sensu-

ousness and immaculate chastity. Morality, indeed, is its very pulse-beat. It could be sung only in an age when love reigned supreme, and could presume to treat humor as a pretender. So lofty a song was bound to awaken echoes and stimulate imitation, and its music has flowed down through the centuries, weaving a thread of melody about the heart of many a poet.

The centuries of Israelitish history close upon its composition, however, were favorable to neither the poetry of love nor that of humor. But the poetry of love must have continued to exercise puissant magic over hearts and minds, if its supreme poem not only was made part of the holy canon, but was considered by a teacher of the Talmud the most sacred treasure of the compilation.

The blood of the Maccabean heroes victorious over Antiochus Epiphanes again fructified the old soil of Hebrew poetry, and charmed forth fragrant blossoms, the psalms designated as Maccabean by modern criticism. Written in troublous times, they contain a reference to the humor of the future: "When the Lord bringeth back again the captivity of Zion, then shall we be like dreamers, then shall our mouth be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing."

Many sad days were destined to pass over Israel before that future with its solacement of humor dawned. No poetic work could obtain recognition next to the Bible. The language of the prophets ceased to be the language of the people, and every



mind was occupied with interpreting their words and applying them to the religious needs of the hour. The opposition between Jewish and Hellenic-Syrian views became more and more marked. Hellas and Judæa, the two great theories of life supporting the fabric of civilization, for the first time confronted each other. An ancient expounder of the Bible says that to Hellas God gave beauty in the beginning, to Judæa truth, as a sacred heritage. But beauty and truth have ever been inveterate foes; even now they are not reconciled.

In Judæa and Greece, ancient civilization found equally perfect, yet totally different, expression. The Greek worships nature as she is; the Jew dwells upon the origin and development of created things, hence worships their Creator. The former in his speculations proceeds from the multiplicity of phenomena; the latter discerns the unity of the plan. To the former the universe was changeless actuality; to the latter it meant unending development. The world, complete and perfect, was mirrored in the Greek mind; its evolution, in the Jewish. Therefore the Jewish conception of life is harmonious, while among the Greeks grew up the spirit of doubt and speculation, the product of civilization, and the soil upon which humor disports.

Israel's religion so completely satisfied every spiritual craving that no room was left for the growth of the poetic instinct. Intellectual life began to divide into two great streams. The Halacha continued the instruction of the prophets, as the Hag-

gada fostered the spirit of the psalmists. The province of the former was to formulate the Law, of the latter to plant a garden about the bulwark of the Law. While the one addressed itself to reason, the other made an appeal to the heart and the feelings. In the Haggada, a thesaurus of the national poetry by the nameless poets of many centuries, we find epic poems and lyric outbursts, fables, enigmas, and dramatic essays, and here and there in this garden we chance across a little bud of humorous composition.

Of what sort was this humor? In point of fact, what is humor? We must be able to answer the latter question before we may venture to classify the folklore of the Haggada.

To reach the ideal, to bring harmony out of discord, is the recognized task of all art. This is the primary principle to be borne in mind in æsthetic criticism. Tragedy idealizes the world by annihilation, harmonizes all contradictions by dashing them in pieces against each other, and points the way of escape from chaos, across the bridge of death, to the realm beyond, irradiated by the perpetual morning-dawn of freedom and intellect.

Comedy, on the other hand, believes that the incongruities and imperfections of life can be justified, and have their uses. Firmly convinced of the might of truth, it holds that the folly and aberrations of men, their shortcomings and failings, cannot impede its eventual victory. Even in them it sees traces of an eternal, divine principle. While tragedy

precipitates the conflict of hostile forces, comedy, rising serene above folly and all indications of transitoriness, reconciles inconsistencies, and lovingly coaxes them into harmony with the true and the absolute.

When man's spirit is thus made to re-enter upon the enjoyment of eternal truth, its heritage, there is, as some one has well said, triumph akin to the joy of the father over the home-coming of a lost son, and the divine, refreshing laughter by which it is greeted is like the meal prepared for the returning favorite. Is Israel to have no seat at the table? Israel, the first to recognize that the eternal truths of life are innate in man, the first to teach, as his chief message, how to reconcile man with himself and the world, whenever these truths suffer temporary obscuration? So viewed, humor is the offspring of love, and also mankind's redeemer, inasmuch as it paralyzes the influence of anger and hatred, emanations from the powers of change and finality, by laying bare the eternal principles and "sweet reasonableness" hidden even in them, and finally stripping them of every adjunct incompatible with the serenity of absolute truth. In whatever mind humor, that is, love and cheerfulness, reigns supreme, the inconsistencies and imperfections of life, all that bears the impress of mutability, will gently and gradually be fused into the harmonious perfection of absolute, eternal truth. Mists sometimes gather about the sun, but unable to extinguish his light, they are forced to serve as his mirror, on which he throws

the witching charms of the *Fata Morgana*. So, when the eternal truths of life are veiled, opportunity is made for humor to play upon and irradiate them. In precise language, humor is a state of perfect self-certainty, in which the mind serenely rises superior to every petty disturbance.

This placidity shed its soft light into the modest academies of the rabbis. Wherever a ray fell, a blossom of Haggadic folklore sprang up. Every occurrence in life recommends itself to their loving scrutiny: pleasures and follies of men, curse turned into blessing, the ordinary course of human events, curiosities of Israel's history and mankind's. As instances of their method, take what Midrashic folklore has to say concerning the creation of the two things of perennial interest to poets: wife and wine.

When the Lord God created woman, he formed her not from the head of man, lest she be too proud; not from his eye, lest she be too coquettish; not from his ear, lest she be too curious; not from his mouth, lest she be too talkative; not from his heart, lest she be too sentimental; not from his hands, lest she be too officious; nor from his feet, lest she be an idle gadabout; but from a subordinate part of man's anatomy, to teach her: "Woman, be thou modest!"

With regard to the vine, the Haggada tells us that when Father Noah was about to plant the first one, Satan stepped up to him, leading a lamb, a lion, a pig, and an ape, to teach him that so long as man does not drink wine, he is innocent as a lamb;



if he drinks temperately, he is as strong as a lion; if he indulges too freely, he sinks to the level of swine; and as for the ape, his place in the poetry of wine is as well known to us as to the rabbis of old.

With the approach of the great catastrophe destined to annihilate Israel's national existence, humor and spontaneity vanish, to be superseded by seriousness, melancholy, and bitter complaints, and the centuries of despondency and brooding that followed it were not better calculated to encourage the expression of love and humor. The pall was not lifted until the Haggada performed its mission as a comforter. Under its gentle ministrations, and urged into vitality by the religious needs of the synagogue, the poetic instinct awoke. *Piut* and *Selicha* replaced prophecy and psalmody as religious agents, and thenceforth the springs of consolation were never permitted to run dry. Driven from the shores of the Jordan and the Euphrates, Hebrew poetry found a new home on the Tagus and the Manzanares, where the Jews were blessed with a second golden age. In the interval from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, under genial Arabic influences, Andalusian masters of song built up an ideal world of poetry, wherein love and humor were granted untrammelled liberty.

To the Spanish-Jewish writers poetry was an end in itself. Along with religious songs, perfect in rhythm and form, they produced lyrics on secular subjects, whose grace, beauty, harmony, and wealth of thought rank them with the finest creations of the

age. The spirit of the prophets and psalmists revived in these Spanish poets. At their head stands Solomon ibn Gabirol, the Faust of Saragossa, whose poems are the first tinged with *Weltschmerz*, that peculiar ferment characteristic of a modern school of poets.<sup>1</sup> Our accounts of Gabirol's life are meagre, but they leave the clear impression that he was not a favorite of fortune, and passed a bleak childhood and youth. His poems are pervaded by vain longing for the ideal, by lamentations over deceived hopes and unfulfilled aspirations, by painful realization of the imperfection and perishability of all earthly things, and the insignificance and transitoriness of life, in a word, by *Weltschmerz*, in its purest, ideal form, not merely self-deception and irony turned against one's own soul life, but a profoundly solemn emotion, springing from sublime pity for the misery of the world read by the light of personal trials and sorrows. He sang not of a mistress' blue eyes, nor sighed forth melancholy love-notes—the object of his heart's desire was Zion, his muse the fair "rose of Sharon," and his anguish was for the suffering of his scattered people. Strong, wild words fitly express his tempestuous feelings. He is a proud, solitary thinker. Often his *Weltschmerz* wrests scornful criticism of his surroundings from him. On the other hand, he does not lack mild, conciliatory humor, of which his famous drinking-song is a good illustration. His miserly host had

<sup>1</sup> For Gabirol, cmp. A. Geiger, *Salomon Gabirol*, and M. Sachs, *Die religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien*.

put a single bottle of wine upon a table surrounded by many guests, who had to have recourse to water to quench their thirst. Wine he calls a septuagenarian, the letters of the Hebrew word for wine (*yayin*) representing seventy, and water a nonagenarian, because *mayim* (water) represents ninety:

## WATER SONG

CHORUS:—Of wine, alas ! there's not a drop,  
Our host has filled our goblets to the top  
With water.

When monarch wine lies prone,  
By water overthrown,  
How can a merry song be sung ?  
For naught there is to wet our tongue  
But water.

CHORUS:—Of wine, alas ! etc.

No sweetmeats can delight  
My dainty appetite,  
For I, alas ! must learn to drink,  
However I may writhe and shrink,  
Pure water.

CHORUS:—Of wine, alas ! etc.

Give Moses praise, for he  
Made waterless a sea—  
Mine host to quench my thirst—the churl !—  
Makes streams of clearest water purl,  
Of water.

CHORUS:—Of wine, alas ! etc.

To toads I feel allied,  
To frogs by kinship tied ;  
For water drinking is no joke,  
Ere long you all will hear me croak  
Quack water !

CHORUS:—Of wine, alas ! etc.

May God our host requite ;  
 May he turn Nazirite,  
 Ne'er know intoxication's thrill,  
 Nor e'er succeed his thirst to still  
     With water !

CHORUS :—Of wine, alas ! etc."

Gabirol was a bold thinker, a great poet wrestling with the deepest problems of human thought, and towering far above his contemporaries and immediate successors. In his time synagogue poetry reached the zenith of perfection, and even in the solemn admonitions of ritualistic literature, humor now and again asserted itself. One of Gabirol's contemporaries or successors, Isaac ben Yehuda ibn Ghayyat, for instance, often made his whole poem turn upon a witticism.

Among the writers of that age, a peculiar style called "mosaic" gradually grew up, and eventually became characteristic of neo-Hebraic poetry and humor. For their subjects and the presentation of their thoughts, they habitually made use of biblical phraseology, either as direct quotations or with an application not intended by the original context. In the latter case, well-known sentences were invested with new meanings, and this poetic-biblical phraseology afforded countless opportunities for the exercise of humor, of which neo-Hebraic poetry availed itself freely. The "mosaics" were collected not only from the Bible; the Targum, the Mishna, and the Talmud were rifled of sententious expressions, woven together, and with the license of art



placed in unexpected juxtaposition. An example will make clear the method. In Genesis xviii. 29, God answers Abraham's petition in behalf of Sodom with the words: "I will not do it for the sake of forty," meaning, as everybody knows, that forty men would suffice to save the city from destruction. This passage Isaac ben Yehuda ibn Ghayyat audaciously connects with Deuteronomy xxv. 3, where forty is also mentioned, the forty stripes for misdemeanors of various kinds:

"If you see men the path of right forsake,  
To bring them back you must an effort make.  
Perhaps, if they but hear of stripes, they'll quake,  
And say, 'I'll do it not for forty's sake.'"

This "mosaic" style, suggesting startling contrasts and surprising applications of Bible thoughts and words, became a fruitful source of Jewish humor. If a theory of literary descent could be established, an illustration might be found in Heine's rapid transitions from tender sentiment to corroding wit, a modern development of the flashing humor of the "mosaic" style.

The "Song of Songs" naturally became a treasure-house of "mosaic" suggestions for the purposes of neo-Hebraic love poetry, which was dominated, however, by Arab influences. The first poet to introduce the sorrow of unhappy love into neo-Hebraic poetry was Moses ibn Ezra. He was in love with his niece, who probably became the wife of one of his brothers, and died early on giving birth to a

son. His affection at first was requited, but his brothers opposed the union, and the poet left Spain, embittered and out of sorts with fate, to find peace and consolation in distant lands. Many of his poems are deeply tinged with gloom and pessimism, and the natural inference is that those in which he praises nature, and wine, and "bacchanalian feasts under leafy canopies with merry minstrelsy of birds" belong to the period of his life preceding its unfortunate turning-point, when love still smiled upon him, and hope was strong.

Some of his poems may serve as typical specimens of the love-poetry of those days:

"With hopeless love my heart is sick,  
 Confession bursts my lips' restraint.  
 That thou, my love, dost cast me off,  
 Hath touched me with a death-like taint.

I view the land both near and far,  
 To me it seems a prison vast.  
 Throughout its breadth, where'er I look,  
 My eyes are met by doors locked fast.

And though the world stood open wide,  
 Though angel hosts filled ev'ry space,  
 To me 'twere destitute of charm  
 Didst thou withdraw thy face."

Here is another:

"Perchance in days to come,  
 When men and all things change,  
 They'll marvel at my love,  
 And call it passing strange.

Without I seem most calm,  
 But fires rage within—  
 'Gainst me, as none before,  
 Thou didst a grievous sin.

What! tell the world my woe!  
 That were exceeding vain.  
 With mocking smile they'd say,  
 'You know, he is not sane!''

When his lady-love died, he composed the following elegy:

"In pain she bore the son who her embrace  
 Would never know. Relentless death spread straight  
 His nets for her, and she, scarce animate,  
 Unto her husband signed: I ask this grace,  
 My friend, let not harsh death our love efface;  
 To our babes, its pledges, dedicate  
 Thy faithful care; for vainly they await  
 A mother's smile each childish fear to chase.  
 And to my uncle, prithee, write. Deep pain  
 I brought his heart. Consumed by love's regret  
 He roved, a stranger in his home. I fain  
 Would have him shed a tear, nor love forget.  
 He seeketh consolation's cup, but first  
 His soul with bitterness must quench its thirst."

Moses ibn Ezra's cup of consolation on not a few occasions seems to have been filled to overflowing with wine. In no other way can the joyousness of his drinking-songs be accounted for. The following are characteristic:

"Wine cooleth man in summer's heat,  
 And warmeth him in winter's sleet.  
 My buckler 'tis 'gainst chilling frost,  
 My shield when rays of sun exhaust."

"If men will probe their inmost heart,  
 They must condemn their crafty art:  
 For silver pieces they make bold  
 To ask a drink of liquid gold."

To his mistress, naturally, many a stanza of witty praise and coaxing imagery was devoted:

"My love is like a myrtle tree,  
 When at the dance her hair falls down.  
 Her eyes deal death most pitiless,  
 Yet who would dare on her to frown?"

"Said I to sweetheart: 'Why dost thou resent  
 The homage to thy grace by old men paid?'  
 She answered me with question pertinent:  
 'Dost thou prefer a widow to a maid?'"

To his love-poems and drinking-songs must be added his poems of friendship, on true friends, life's crowning gift, and false friends, basest of creatures. He has justly been described as the most subjective of neo-Hebraic poets. His blithe delight in love, exhaling from his poems, transfigured his ready humor, which instinctively pierced to the ludicrous element in every object and occurrence: age dyeing its hair, traitorous friendship, the pride of wealth, or separation of lovers.

Yet in the history of synagogue literature this poet goes by the name *Ha-Sallach*, "penitential poet," on account of his many religious songs, bewailing in elegiac measure the hollowness of life, and the vanity of earthly possessions, and in ardent words advocating humility, repentance, and a con-



trite heart. The peculiarity of Jewish humor is that it returns to its tragic source.

No mediæval poet so markedly illustrates this characteristic as the prince of neo-Hebraic poetry, Yehuda Halevi, in whose poems the principle of Jewish national poesy attained its completest expression. They are the idealized reflex of the soul of the Jewish people, its poetic emotions, its "making for righteousness," its patriotic love of race, its capacity for martyrdom. Whatever true and beautiful element had developed in Jewish soul life, since the day when Judah's song first rang out in Zion's accents on Spanish soil, greets us in its noblest garb in his poetry. A modern poet<sup>1</sup> says of him:

" Ay, he was a master singer,  
Brilliant pole star of his age,  
Light and beacon to his people !  
Wondrous mighty was his singing—

Verily a fiery pillar  
Moving on 'fore Israel's legions,  
Restless caravan of sorrow,  
Through the exile's desert plain."

In his early youth the muse of poetry had imprinted a kiss upon Halevi's brow, and the gracious echo of that kiss trembles through all the poet's numbers. Love, too, seems early to have taken up an abode in his susceptible heart, but, as expressed in the poems of his youth, it is not sensuous, earthly love, nor Gabirol's despondency and unselfish grief,

<sup>1</sup> H. Heine, *Romanzero*.

nor even the sentiment of Moses ibn Ezra's artistically conceived and technically perfect love-plaint. It is tender, yet passionate, frankly extolling the happiness of requited love, and as naïvely miserable over separation from his mistress, whom he calls Ophra (fawn). One of his sweetest songs he puts upon her lips:

“Into my eyes he loving looked,  
 My arms about his neck were twined,  
 And in the mirror of my eyes,  
 What but his image did he find?  
  
 Upon my dark-hued eyes he pressed  
 His lips with breath of passion rare.  
 The rogue! 'Twas not my eyes he kissed;  
 He kissed his picture mirrored there.”

Ophra's "Song of Joy" reminds one of the passion of the "Song of Songs":

“He cometh, O bliss!  
 Fly swiftly, ye winds,  
 Ye odorous breezes,  
 And tell him how long  
 I've waited for this!  
  
 O happy that night,  
 When sunk on thy breast,  
 Thy kisses fast falling,  
 And drunken with love,  
 My troth I did plight.  
  
 Again my sweet friend  
 Embraceth me close.  
 Yes, heaven doth bless us,  
 And now thou hast won  
 My love without end.”

His mistress' charms he describes with attractive grace:

"My sweetheart's dainty lips are red,  
With ruby's crimson overspread ;  
Her teeth are like a string of pearls ;  
Adown her neck her clust'ring curls  
In ebon hue vie with the night ;  
And o'er her features dances light.

The twinkling stars enthroned above  
Are sisters to my dearest love.  
We men should count it joy complete  
To lay our service at her feet.  
But ah! what rapture in her kiss!  
A forecast 'tis of heav'nly bliss!"

When the hour of parting from Ophra came, the young poet sang:

"And so we twain must part! Oh linger yet,  
Let me still feed my glance upon thine eyes.  
Forget not, love, the days of our delight,  
And I our nights of bliss shall ever prize.  
In dreams thy shadowy image I shall see,  
Oh even in my dream be kind to me!"<sup>1</sup>

Yehuda Halevi sang not only of love, but also, in true Oriental fashion, and under the influence of his Arabic models, of wine and friendship. On the other hand, he is entirely original in his epithalamiums, charming descriptions of the felicity of young conjugal life and the sweet blessings of pure love. They are pervaded by the intensity of joy,

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Emma Lazarus. [Tr.]

and full of roguish allusions to the young wife's shamefacedness, arousing the jest and merriment of her guests, and her delicate shrinking in the presence of longed-for happiness. Characteristically enough his admonitions to feed the fire of love are always followed by a sigh for his people's woes:

"You twain will soon be one,  
And all your longing filled.  
Ah me ! will Israel's hope  
For freedom e'er be stilled ?"

It is altogether probable that these blithesome songs belong to the poet's early life. To a friend who remonstrates with him for his love of wine he replies:

"My years scarce number twenty-one—  
Wouldst have me now the wine-cup shun ?"

which would seem to indicate that love and wine were the pursuits of his youth. One of his prettiest drinking songs is the following:

"My bowl yields exultation—  
I soar aloft on song-tipped wing,  
Each draught is inspiration,  
My lips sip wine, my mouth must sing.

Dear friends are full of horror,  
Predict a toper's end for me.  
They ask : 'How long, O sorrow,  
Wilt thou remain wine's devotee ?'

Why should I not sing praise of drinking ?  
The joys of Eden it makes mine.  
If age will bring no cowardly shrinking,  
Full many a year will I drink wine."



But little is known of the events of the poet's career. History's niggardliness, however, has been compensated for by the prodigality of legend, which has woven many a fanciful tale about his life. Of one fact we are certain: when he had passed his fiftieth year, Yehuda Halevi left his native town, his home, his family, his friends, and disciples, to make a pilgrimage to Palestine, the land wherein his heart had always dwelt. His itinerary can be traced in his songs. They lead us to Egypt, to Zoan, to Damascus. In Tyre silence suddenly falls upon the singer. Did he attain the goal he had set out to reach? Did his eye behold the land of his fathers? Or did death overtake the pilgrim singer before his journey's end? Legend which has beautified his life has transfigured his death. It is said, that struck by a Saracen's horse Yehuda Halevi sank down before the very gates of Jerusalem. With its towers and battlements in sight, and his inspired "Lay of Zion" on his lips, his pure soul winged its flight heavenward.

With the death of Yehuda Halevi, the golden age of neo-Hebraic poetry in Spain came to an end, and the period of the epigones was inaugurated. A note of hesitancy is discernible in their productions, and they acknowledge the superiority of their predecessors in the epithet "fathers of song" applied to them. The most noted of the later writers was Yehuda ben Solomon Charisi. Fortune marked him out to be the critic of the great poetic creations of the brilliant epoch just closed, and his fame rests

upon the skill with which he acquitted himself of his difficult task. As for his poetry, it lacks the depth, the glow, the virility, and inspiration of the works of the classical period. He was a restless wanderer, a poet tramp, roving in the Orient, in Africa, and in Europe. His most important work is his divan *Tachkemoni*, testifying to his powers as a humorist, and especially to his mastery of the Hebrew language, which he uses with dexterity never excelled. The divan touches upon every possible subject: God and nature, human life and suffering, the relations between men, his personal experiences, and his adventures in foreign parts. The first Makamat<sup>1</sup> writer among Jews, he furnished the model for all poems of the kind that followed; their first genuine humorist, he flashes forth his wit like a stream of light suddenly turned on in the dark. That he measured the worth of his productions by the generous meed of praise given by his contemporaries is a venial offense in the time of the troubadours and minnesingers. Charisi was particularly happy in his use of the "mosaic" style, and his short poems and epigrams are most charming. Deep melancholy is a foil to his humor, but as often his writings are disfigured by levity. The following may serve as samples of his versatile muse. The first is addressed to his grey hair:

"Those ravens black that rested  
 Erstwhile upon my head,  
 Within my heart have nested,  
 Since from my hair they fled."

<sup>1</sup> See note, p. 34. [Tr.]

The second is inscribed to love's tears:

"Within my heart I held concealed  
My love so tender and so true;  
But overflowing tears revealed  
What I would fain have hid from view.  
My heart could evermore repress  
The woe that tell-tale tears confess."

Charisi is at his best when he gives the rein to his humor. Sparks fly; he stops at no caustic witticism, recoils from no satire; he is malice itself, and puts no restraint upon his levity. The "Flea Song" is a typical illustration of his impish mood:

"You ruthless flea, who desecrate my couch,  
And draw my blood to sate your appetite,  
You know not rest, on Sabbath day or feast—  
Your feast it is when you can pinch and bite.

My friends expound the law: to kill a flea  
Upon the Sabbath day a sin they call;  
But I prefer that other law which says,  
Be sure a murd'rer's malice to forestall."

That Charisi was a boon companion is evident from the following drinking song:

"Here under leafy bowers,  
Where coolest shades descend,  
Crowned with a wreath of flowers,  
Here will we drink, my friend.

Who drinks of wine, he learns  
That noble spirits' strength  
But steady increase earns,  
As years stretch out in length.

A thousand earthly years  
 Are hours in God's sight,  
 A year in heav'n appears  
 A minute in its flight.

I would this lot were mine :  
 To live by heav'nly count,  
 And drink and drink old wine  
 At youth's eternal fount."

Charisi and his Arabic models found many imitators among Spanish Jews. Solomon ibn Sakbel wrote Hebrew Makamat which may be regarded as an attempt at a satire in the form of a romance. The hero, Asher ben Yehuda, a veritable Don Juan, passes through most remarkable adventures.<sup>1</sup> The introductory Makama, describing life with his mistress in the solitude of a forest, is delicious. Tired of his monotonous life, he joins a company of convivial fellows, who pass their time in carousal. While with them, he receives an enigmatic love letter signed by an unknown woman, and he sets out to find her. On his wanderings, oppressed by love's doubts, he chances into a harem, and is threatened with death by its master. It turns out that the pasha is a beautiful woman, the slave of his mysterious lady-love, and she promises him speedy fulfillment of his wishes. Finally, close to the attainment of his end, he discovers that his beauty is a myth, the whole a practical joke perpetrated by his merry companions. So Asher ben Yehuda in quest of his mistress is led from adventure to adventure.

<sup>1</sup>J. Schor in *He-Chaluz*, Vol. IV., p. 154 ff.



Internal evidence testifies against the genuineness of this romance, but at the same time with it appeared two other mock-heroic poems, "The Book of Diversions" (*Sefer Sha'ashuim*) by Joseph ibn Sabara, and "The Gift of Judah the Misogynist" (*Minchath Yehuda Soneh ha-Nashim*) by Judah ibn Sabbataï, a Cordova physician, whose poems Charisi praised as the "fount of poesy." The plot of his "Gift," a satire on women, is as follows:<sup>1</sup> His dying father exacts from Serach, the hero of the romance, a promise never to marry, women in his sight being the cause of all the evil in the world. Curious as the behest is, it is still more curious that Serach uncomplainingly complies, and most curious of all, that he finds three companions willing to retire with him to a distant island, whence their propaganda for celibacy is to proceed. Scarcely has the news of their arrival spread, when a mass meeting of women is called, and a coalition formed against the misogynists. Korbi, an old hag, engages to make Serach faithless to his principles. He soon has a falling out with his fellow-celibates, and succumbs to the fascinations of a fair young temptress. After the wedding he discovers that his enemies, the women, have substituted for his beautiful bride, a hideous old woman, Blackcoal, the daughter of Owl. She at once assumes the reins of government most energetically, and answers her husband's groan of despair by the following curtain lecture:

<sup>1</sup> S. Stein in *Freitagabend*, p. 645 ff.

"Up! up! the time for sleep is past!  
 And no resistance will I brook!  
 Away with thee, and look to it  
 That thou bringst me what I ask:  
 Gowns of costly stuff,  
 Earrings, chains, and veils;  
 A house with many windows;  
 Mortars, lounges, sieves,  
 Baskets, kettles, pots,  
 Glasses, settles, brooms,  
 Beakers, closets, flasks,  
 Shovels, basins, bowls,  
 Spindle, distaff, blankets,  
 Buckets, ewers, barrels,  
 Skillets, forks, and knives;  
 Vinaigrettes and mirrors;  
 Kerchiefs, turbans, reticules,  
 Crescents, amulets,  
 Rings and jewelled clasps;  
 Girdles, buckles, bodices,  
 Kirtles, caps, and waists;  
 Garments finely spun,  
 Rare byssus from the East.  
 This and more shalt thou procure,  
 No matter at what cost and sacrifice.  
 Thou art affrighted? Thou weepest?  
 My dear, spare all this agitation;  
 Thou'lt suffer more than this.  
 The first year shall pass in strife,  
 The second will see thee a beggar.  
 A prince erstwhile, thou shalt become a slave;  
 Instead of a crown, thou shalt wear a wreath of straw."

Serach in abject despair turns for comfort to his three friends, and it is decided to bring suit for divorce in a general assembly. The women appear at the meeting, and demand that the despiser

of their sex be forced to keep his ugly wife. One of the trio of friends proposes that the matter be brought before the king. The poet appends no moral to his tale; he leaves it to his readers to say: "And such must be the fate of all woman-haters!"

Judah Sabbataï was evidently far from being a woman-hater himself, but some of his contemporaries failed to understand the point of his witticisms and ridiculous situations. Yedaya Penini, another poet, looked upon it as a serious production, and in his allegory, "Woman's Friend," destitute of poetic inspiration, but brilliant in dialectics, undertook the defense of the fair sex against the misanthropic aspersions of the woman-hater.

Such works are evidence that we have reached the age of the troubadours and minnesingers, the epoch of the Renaissance, when, under the blue sky of Italy, and the fostering care of the trio of master-poets, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, the first germs of popular poetry were unfolding. The Italian Jews were carried along by the all-pervading spirit of the times, and had a share in the vigorous mental activity about them. Suggestions derived from the work of the Renaissance leaders fell like electric sparks into Jewish literature and science, lighting them up, and bringing them into rapport with the products of the humanistic movement. Provence, the land of song, gave birth to Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, later a resident of Italy, whose work, "Touchstone" (*Eben Bochan*) is the first true satire in neo-Hebraic poetry. It is a

mirror of morals held up before his people, for high and low, rabbis and leaders, poets and scholars, rich and poor, to see their foibles and follies. The satire expresses a humorous, but lofty conception of life, based upon profound morality and sincere faith. It fulfils every requirement of a satire, steering clear of the pitfall caricature, and not obtruding the didactic element. The lesson to be conveyed is involved in, not stated apart from the satire, an emanation from the poet's disposition. His aim is not to ridicule, but to improve, instruct, influence. One of the most amusing chapters is that on woman's superior advantages, which make him bewail his having been born a man:<sup>1</sup>

" Truly, God's hand lies heavy on him  
 Who has been created a man :  
 Full many a trial he must patiently bear,  
 And scorn and contumely of every kind.  
 His life is like a field laid waste—  
 Fortunate he is if it lasts not too long !  
 Were I, for instance, a woman,  
 How smooth and pleasant were my course.  
 A circle of intimate friends  
 Would call me gentle, graceful, modest.  
 Comfortably I'd sit with them and sew,  
 With one or two mayhap at the spinning wheel.  
 On moonlight nights  
 Gathered for cozy confidences,  
 About the hearthfire, or in the dark,  
 We'd tell each other what the people say,  
 The gossip of the town, the scandals,

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Meisel, *Der Prüfstein des Kalonymos*.



Discuss the fashions and the last election.  
 I surely would rise above the average—  
 I would be an artist needlewoman,  
 Broidering on silk and velvet  
 The flowers of the field,  
 And other patterns, copied from models,  
 So rich in color as to make them seem nature—  
 Petals, trees, blossoms, plants, and pots,  
 And castles, pillars, temples, angel heads,  
 And whatever else can be imitated with needle by her  
 Who guides it with art and skill.  
 Sometimes, too, though 'tis not so attractive,  
 I should consent to play the cook—  
 No less important task of woman 'tis  
 To watch the kitchen most carefully.  
 I should not be ruffled  
 By dust and ashes on the hearth, by soot on stoves and pots;  
 Nor would I hesitate to swing the axe  
 And chop the firewood,  
 And not to feed and rake the fire up,  
 Despite the ashy dust that fills the nostrils.  
 My particular delight it would be  
 To taste of all the dishes served.  
 And if some merry, joyous festival approached,  
 Then would I display my taste.  
 I would choose most brilliant gems for ear and hand,  
 For neck and breast, for hair and gown,  
 Most precious stuffs of silk and velvet,  
 Whatever in clothes and jewels would increase my charms.  
 And on the festal day, I would loud rejoice,  
 Sing, and sway myself, and dance with vim.  
 When I reached a maiden's prime,  
 With all my charms at their height,  
 What happiness, were heaven to favor me,  
 Permit me to draw a prize in life's lottery,  
 A youth of handsome mien, brave and true,  
 With heart filled with love for me.

If he declared his passion,  
 I would return his love with all my might.  
 Then as his wife, I would live a princess,  
 Reclining on the softest pillows,  
 My beauty heightened by velvet, silk, and tulle,  
 By pearls and golden ornaments,  
 Which he with lavish love would bring to me,  
 To add to his delight and mine."

After enumerating additional advantages enjoyed by the gentler sex, the poet comes to the conclusion that protesting against fate is vain, and closes his chapter thus:

"Well, then, I'll resign myself to fate,  
 And seek consolation in the thought that life comes to an end.  
 Our sages tell us everywhere  
 That for all things we must praise God,  
 With loud rejoicing for all good,  
 In submission for evil fortune.  
 So I will force my lips,  
 However they may resist, to say the olden blessing:  
 My Lord and God accept my thanks  
 That thou has made of me a man."

One of Kalonymos's friends was Immanuel ben Solomon of Rome, called the "Heine of the middle ages," and sometimes the "Jewish Voltaire." Neither comparison is apt. On the one hand, they give him too high a place as a writer, on the other, they do not adequately indicate his characteristic qualities. His most important work, the *Mechabberoth*, is a collection of disjointed pieces, full of bold witticisms, poetic thoughts, and linguistics.

tic charms. It is composed of poems, Makamat, parodies, novels, epigrams, distichs, and sonnets—all essentially humorous. The poet presents things as they are, leaving it to reality to create ridiculous situations. He is witty rather than humorous. Rarely only a spark of kindness or the glow of poetry transfigures his wit. He is uniformly objective, scintillating, cold, often frivolous, and not always chaste. To produce a comic effect, to make his readers laugh is his sole desire. Friend and admirer of Dante, he attained to a high degree of skill in the sonnet. In neo-Hebraic poetry, his works mark the beginning of a new epoch. Indelicate witticisms and levity, until then sporadic in Jewish literature, were by him introduced as a regular feature. The poetry of the earlier writers had dwelt upon the power of love, their muse was modest and chaste, a "rose of Sharon," a "lily of the valleys." Immanuel's was of coarser fibre; his witty sallies remind one of Italian rather than Hebrew models. A recent critic of Hebrew poetry speaks of his Makamat as a pendant to "Tristan and Isolde,"—in both sensuality triumphs over spirituality. He is at his best in his sonnets, and of these the finest are in poetic prose. Female beauty is an unfailing source of inspiration to him, but of trust in womankind he has none:

"No woman ever faithful hold,  
Unless she ugly be and old."

The full measure of mockery he poured out upon a deceived husband, and the most cutting sarcasm at

his command against an enemy is a comparison to crabbed, ugly women:

"I loathe him with the hot and honest hate  
That fills a rake 'gainst maids he cannot bait,  
With which an ugly hag her glass reviles,  
And prostitutes the youths who 'scape their wiles."

His devotion to woman's beauty is altogether in the spirit of his Italian contemporaries. One of his most pleasing sonnets is dedicated to his lady-love's eyes:<sup>1</sup>

"My sweet gazelle! From thy bewitching eyes  
A glance thrills all my soul with wild delight.  
Unfathomed depths beam forth a world so bright—  
With rays of sun its sparkling splendor vies—  
One look within a mortal deifies.  
Thy lips, the gates wherethrough dawn wings its flight,  
Adorn a face suffused with rosy light,  
Whose radiance puts to shame the vaulted skies.  
Two brilliant stars are they from heaven sent—  
Their charm I cannot otherwise explain—  
By God but for a little instant lent,  
Who gracious doth their lustrous glory deign,  
To teach those on pursuit of beauty bent,  
Beside those eyes all other beauty's vain."

Immanuel's most congenial work, however, is as a satirist. One of his best known poems is a chain of distichs, drawing a comparison between two maidens, Tamar the beautiful, and Beria the homely:

<sup>1</sup> Livius Fürst in *Illustrierte Monatshefte*, Vol. I., p. 105 ff.



"Tamar raises her eyelids, and stars appear in the sky;  
Her glance drops to earth, and flowers clothe the knoll  
whereon she stands.

Beria looks up, and basilisks die of terror;  
Be not amazed; 'tis a sight that would Satan affright.  
Tamar's divine form human language cannot describe;  
The gods themselves believe her heaven's offspring.  
Beria's presence is desirable only in the time of vintage,  
When the Evil One can be banished by naught but grimaces.  
Tamar! Had Moses seen thee he had never made the ser-  
pent of copper,

With thy image he had healed mankind.  
Beria! Pain seizes me, physic soothes,  
I catch sight of thee, and it returns with full force.  
Tamar, with ringlets adorned, greets early the sun,  
Who quickly hides, ashamed of his bald pate.  
Beria! were I to meet thee on New Year's Day in the morn-  
ing,

An omen 'twere of an inauspicious year.  
Tamar smiles, and heals the heart's bleeding wounds;  
She raises her head, the stars slink out of sight.  
Beria it were well to transport to heaven,  
Then surely heaven would take refuge on earth.  
Tamar resembles the moon in all respects but one—  
Her resplendent beauty never suffers obscuration.  
Beria partakes of the nature of the gods; 'tis said,  
None beholds the gods without most awful repentance.  
Tamar, were the Virgin like thee, never would the sun  
Pass out of Virgo to shine in Libra.  
Beria, dost know why the Messiah tarries to bring deliver-  
ance to men?  
Redemption time has long arrived, but he hides from thee."

With amazement we see the Hebrew muse, so  
serious aforesometimes, participate in truly bacchanalian  
dances under Immanuel's guidance. It is curious

that while, on the one hand, he shrinks from no frivolous utterance or indecent allusion, on the other, he is dominated by deep earnestness and genuine warmth of feeling, when he undertakes to defend or expound the fundamentals of faith. It is characteristic of the trend of his thought that he epitomizes the "Song of Songs" in the sentence: "Love is the pivot of the *Torah*." By a bold hypothesis it is assumed that in Daniel, his guide in Paradise (in the twenty-eighth canto of his poem), he impersonated and glorified his great friend Dante. If true, this would be an interesting indication of the intimate relations existing between a Jew and a circle devoted to the development of the national genius in literature and language, and the stimulating of the sense of nature and truth in opposition to the fantastic visions and grotesque ideals of the past.

Everywhere, not only in Italy, the Renaissance and the humanistic movement attract Jews. Among early Castilian troubadours there is a Jew, and the last troubadour of Spain again is a Jew. Naturally Italian Jews are more profoundly than others affected by the renascence of science and art. David ben Yehuda, Messer Leon, is the author of an epic, *Shebach Nashim* ("Praise of Women"), in which occurs an interesting reference to Petrarch's Laura, whom, in opposition to the consensus of opinion among his contemporaries, he considers, not a fragment of the imagination, but a woman of flesh and blood. Praise and criticism of women are favorite

themes in the poetic polemics of the sixteenth century. For instance, Jacob ben Elias, of Fano, in his "Shields of Heroes," a small collection of songs in stanzas of three verses, ventures to attack the weaker sex, for which Judah Tommo of Porta Leone at once takes up the cudgels in his "Women's Shield." At the same time a genuine song combat broke out between Abraham of Sarteano and Elias of Genzano. The latter is the champion of the purity of womanhood, impugned by the former, who in fifty tercets exposes the wickedness of woman in the most infamous of her sex, from Lilith to Jezebel, from Semiramis to Medea. An anonymous combatant lends force to his strictures by an arraignment of the lax morals of the women of their own time, while a fourth knight of song, evidently intending to conciliate the parties, begins his "New Song," only a fragment of which has reached us, with praise, and ends it with blame, of woman. Such productions, too, are a result of the Renaissance, of its romantic current, which, as it affected Catholicism, did not fail to leave its mark upon the Jews, among whom romanticists must have had many a battle to fight with adherents of traditional views.

Meantime, neo-Hebraic poetry had "fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf." Poetry drooped under the icy breath of rationalism, and vanished into the abyss of the Kabbala. At most we occasionally hear of a polemic poem, a keen-edged epigram. For the rest, there was only a monotonous succession of religious poems, repeating the old formulas, dry

bones of habit and tradition, no longer informed with true poetic, religious spirit. Yet the source of love and humor in Jewish poetry had not run dry. It must be admitted that the sentimentalism of the minneservice, peculiar to the middle ages, never took root in Jewish soil. Pale resignation, morbid despair, longing for death, unmanly indulgence in regret, all the paraphernalia of chivalrous love, extolled in every key in the poetry of the middle ages, were foreign to the sane Jewish mind. Women, the object of unreasoning adulation, shared the fate of all sovereign powers: homage worked their ruin. They became accustomed to think that the weal and woe of the world depended upon their constancy or disloyalty. Jews alone were healthy enough to subordinate sexual love to reverence for maternity. Holding an exalted idea of love, they realized that its power extends far beyond the lives of two persons, and affects the well-being of generations unborn. Such love, intellectual love, which Benedict Spinoza was the first to define from a scientific and philosophic point of view, looks far down the vistas of the future, and gives providential thought to the race.

While humor and romanticism everywhere in the middle ages appeared as irreconcilable contrasts, by Jews they were brought into harmonious relationship. When humor was banished from poetry, it took refuge in Jewish-German literature, that spiritual undercurrent produced by the claims of fancy as opposed to the aggressive, all absorbing de-



mands of reason. Not to the high and mighty, but to the lowly in spirit, the little ones of the earth, to women and children, it made its appeal, and from them its influence spread throughout the nation, bringing refreshment and sustenance to weary, starved minds, hope to the oppressed, and consolation to the afflicted. Consolation, indeed, was sorely needed by the Jews on their peregrinations during the middle ages. Sad, inexpressibly sad, was their condition. With fatal exclusiveness they devoted themselves to the study of the Talmud. Secular learning was deprecated; antagonism to science and vagaries characterized their intellectual life; philosophy was formally interdicted; the Hebrew language neglected; all their wealth and force of intellect lavished upon the study of the Law, and even here every faculty—reason, ingenuity, speculation—busied itself only with highly artificial solutions of equally artificial problems, far-fetched complications, and vexatious contradictions invented to be harmonized. Under such grievous circumstances, oppression growing with malice, Jewish minds and hearts were robbed of humor, and the exercise of love was made a difficult task. Is it astonishing that in such days a rabbi in the remote Slavonic East should have issued an injunction restraining his sisters in faith from reading romances on the Sabbath—romances composed by some other rabbi in Provence or Italy five hundred years before?

Sorrow and suffering are not endless. A new day

broke for the Jews. The walls of the Ghetto fell, dry bones joined each other for new life, and a fresh spirit passed over the House of Israel. Enervation and decadence were succeeded by regeneration, quickened by the spirit of the times, by the ideas of freedom and equality universally advocated. The forces which culminated in their revival had existed as germs in the preceding century. Silently they had grown, operating through every spiritual medium, poetry, oratory, philosophy, political agitation. In the sunshine of the eighteenth century they finally matured, and at its close the rejuvenation of the Jewish race was an accomplished fact in every European country. Eagerly its sons entered into the new intellectual and literary movements of the nations permitted to enjoy another period of efflorescence, and Jewish humor has conquered a place for itself in modern literature.

Our brief journey through the realm of love and humor must certainly convince us that in sunny days humor rarely, love never, forsook Israel. Our old itinerant preachers (*Maggidim*), strolling from town to town, were in the habit of closing their sermons with a parable (*Mashai*), which opened the way to exhortation. The manner of our fathers recommends itself to me, and following in their footsteps, I venture to close my pilgrimage through the ages with a *Mashal*. It transports us to the sunny Orient, to the little seaport town of Jabneh, about six miles from Jerusalem, in the time immediately succeeding the destruction of the Temple.

Thither with a remnant of his disciples, Jochanan ben Zakkaï, one of the wisest of our rabbis, fled to escape the misery incident to the downfall of Jerusalem. He knew that the Temple would never again rise from its ashes. He knew as well that the essence of Judaism has no organic connection with the Temple or the Holy City. He foresaw that its mission is to spread abroad among the nations of the earth, and of this future he spoke to the disciples gathered about him in the academy at Jabneh. We can imagine him asking them to define the fundamental principle of Judaism, and receiving a multiplicity of answers, varying with the character and temper of the young missionaries. To one, possibly, Judaism seemed to rest upon faith in God, to another upon the Sabbath, to a third upon the *Torah*, to a fourth upon the Decalogue. Such views could not have satisfied the spiritual cravings of the aged teacher. When Jochanan ben Zakkaï rises to give utterance to his opinion, we feel as though the narrow walls of the academy at Jabneh were miraculously widening out to enclose the world, while the figure of the venerable rabbi grows to the noble proportions of a divine seer, whose piercing eye rends the veil of futurity, and reads the remote verdict of history: "My disciples, my friends, the fundamental principle of Judaism is love!"